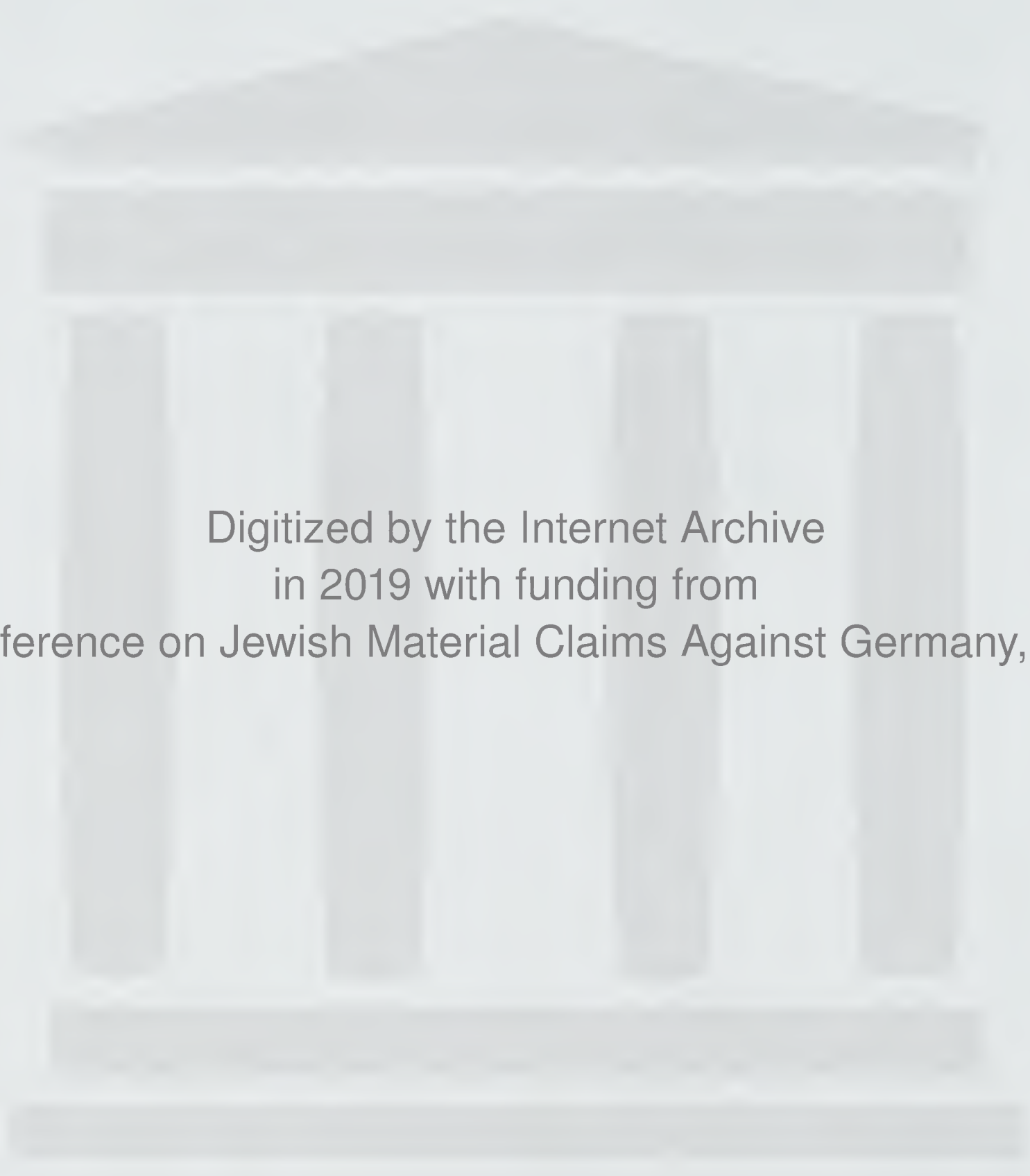


ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.

<https://archive.org/details/daddywatchedover01stei>

DADDY WATCHED OVER ME

Barbara Steiner's Story
Of
Struggle and Survival
In Nazi Poland

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the people who have helped me, not only on this project, but those who have made my life meaningful and full throughout the post Holocaust years.

First of all, my late husband, Arnold Steiner who enabled me to survive. Without him I would not have had the will to survive. He revived my spirit and made me think there *could* be a future.

Of course, I want to thank my wonderful children and grandchildren, Dr. Marvin and Eva Steiner and Muriel and Scott Blumstein, Aaron, Jonathan, Robbie and Ally who were and continue to be my source of happiness. Without them my life would be empty.

I also want to thank Scott's parents, Dr. Robert and Merle Silverstein who, with their warmth and friendship, have made me feel a part of their family.

Lastly, I want to thank one special person, a dear friend of mine, Dalya Horowitz, without whom this book would never be written. I want to thank her for all the wonderful things she did for me. For all the help, the hours spent on dictating and writing, and most of all for her friendship and her caring.

May God bless all of these people for all their love.

Barbara Steiner
February, 2003

FORWARD

It's not easy to put 75 years on paper and to go back to my parents and grandparents - to talk about the life in Warsaw - about the city in which my parents, grandparents and all the rest of my family was born and lived.

In this book, I propose to tell the story, not only of my Holocaust experiences, but of my life before and after those six tragic, dehumanizing and horrifying years.

My life, as well as all Holocaust survivors and victims, was destroyed during that unimaginably terrible time. But I want you to know that before that awful time I had a happy and carefree life as a child and young girl. I had many interesting and wonderful relatives, many happy and lovely memories of my childhood. In short, I was a typical young girl of the 30's.

In addition, I wanted to write this book as a history to acquaint my children with their family, whom they know only through my stories and conversations. Not only are there no living relatives, but no pictures, no letters, nothing to indicate that there was a huge, loving extended family and a close nuclear family.

Even though they are not fortunate enough to know these fascinating people I called my family, I hope to bring them to life again in the pages of this book.

Through the years, I have told my story to many young people. In writing this volume, I hope to reach and educate many more people, young and old. I vehemently want them to cherish their lives and to understand that this life we have in the United States cannot and should not be taken for granted. This wonderful life of ours could be destroyed if we are not always vigilant and watchful.

Let us hope that I and my fellow survivors can serve to promote understanding, tolerance and knowledge so that this terrible catastrophe won't be repeated.

CHAPTER ONE

Both my father and mother's families were born in Warsaw. Warsaw, as I remember it, was a beautiful city. It was a city of large, expansive avenues, lush parks, lovely theatres and fine museums. I remember the ornate, exquisite opera house where I saw several operas as a child. There was the Wazhienki Palace which was magnificent and very large, located in a park setting in the style of all European palaces.

Of course, not all parts of the city were so beautiful. There were Christian and Jewish neighborhoods that were quite poor and rundown. In some of the poorest neighborhoods there was no running water and no indoor plumbing.

In my time, the population of the city was 1 1/2 million people. One-third of the people were Jewish, approximately 500,000.

Many of the Jews were hard workers, very poor. They lived in Jewish neighborhoods. There were also families of better means and rich families, as well as many intellectuals. Jews in Poland came from every section of the religious spectrum from Hassidim to people who didn't practice the religion at all.

Whatever their means, the Jews of Warsaw and other parts of Poland were at the epicenter of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

There was a fine social life. There were many Jewish newspapers, great Jewish theatres, libraries, and private religious schools. In short, in spite of the rampant anti-Semitism throughout Poland, Jewish life was alive and vital and thriving in Warsaw and the rest of Poland when I was a young girl.

All of this before 1939.

Let me take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about my background and life even before I was born. My family came from a beautiful background. In Poland there were classes. Each and every boy, with the exception of the one who came to America, married girls with lots of money. All the boys went to Yeshiva, and the girls went to

private schools as well. That is true for both by mother and father's families. My father's sisters went to school outside the house, but my Mother's family had tutors for the girls inside the home. They learned piano and languages.

Let me tell you a little bit about my background and the life even before I was born. I know about my grandparents mostly from my parents. I know that my mother's parents, Shlomo Kuperman and his wife, Esther were both born in Warsaw. Both of them were orphans raised by rabbis so they had a religious background. They were married very young and supposedly, my little grandmother, who married my very tall, very large grandfather, was the brains of the family.

She was the one who insisted that, instead of my grandfather going into a shul and becoming a practicing rabbi, encouraged him to go into business. Their business was scrap metal. They bought discarded metal objects from peddlers and kept it in a yard. They then sold it to big companies. They were very successful at this and made a good deal of money.

After a while, my grandfather went into another business and became one of the first builders of apartment buildings in Warsaw.

My grandparents had seven children. There were 5 girls. The first was Regina, then my mother Fraida, then Gucha, Sala, and Baila. The oldest and youngest were boys - Itzhak or as we called him, Itcha, was the oldest and the youngest was Samuel.

Because my Mother's parents were wealthy, they kept my parents in their home, which was very large, and supported them completely for ten years. Not only did they do this with my mother, they did this for all the sisters in the family. All of them were married very young. The oldest sister, Regina married a rabbi. Their last name was Kutner. This rabbi had a shul of his own and he was fanatically frum.

The rest of the sisters were given enough dowry, apartments, furniture, etc. and went into business. Both families were white collar workers and did very well in business. Gucha's husband was in the

jewelry business. Sala and Baila were in fabric stores. The oldest brother had an apartment building and made his living off of this. The youngest one was really an artist, a painter. I really don't know exactly what he did, but they lived very well also.

My mother's two brothers traveled a lot before they got married. The youngest one I remember well.

The oldest brother, Itcha, was married later and he wasn't as religious as the rest of the family. He would take money from the business - from the safe - and just disappear. Later, they would get a letter from him that he was in some country - either in Europe or the U.S. He also traveled to South America and Palestine. He was a very handsome man.

My father said to my mother once that if you would take all of Itcha's children from all over the world, he would have an army. I guess he was a bit of a playboy.

The youngest son also traveled a lot. He got married when I was about 10 years old. That means he must have been in his late 30's. He was a dreamer, an artist and he did some painting after he was married. I think he was in business in the stock market as well. They called it the Berza.

On the other side, in my father's family, I remember my father's mother only vaguely. I can't remember her name, but I remember that she died in 1940 because of the war. She wasn't a youngster - she was in her 70's and for that time it was pretty old.

I remember that she was treated like a queen by all her children. I remember her lovely apartment on Zlota Street. I also remember that she was very jealous of her son's children and we always heard her talking about her sons. I never had a close relationship with her. I know that she was a lady who read and wrote a few languages, so she must have had a good education as a young girl. She came from Jewish society people.

My mother said that her husband, my grandfather, who died before I was born, supposedly was a great man and a very lovable person. Unfortunately, I never knew him. Even worse, there was not even one picture of him, not a painting, or a photograph. I think he was an ordained rabbi but also had a furniture business

There were four brothers and three sisters - seven altogether in the Zyskind family. The boys were my father, Moshe, the oldest, then the next one went to America and died during the depression. I don't know his name. I believe he died before I was born. The third was Feivel who was called Fabian and the youngest was Nathan. The sisters were Regina, Cesia (Saysha) and Helen.

After my father was Regina. Regina was a sweet lady, a great aunt and when I needed someone the most after losing all my other close family, she took me in, even though I was filthy and hungry.

Next was Feivel. He was a very handsome and dashing guy. My Aunt, Manya, his wife, was not nearly as attractive as Feivel. Her mother was very anxious for Feivel to become her suitor. They were wealthy people in the furniture business with a factory and a store. Her mother, Bobcha (I called her "grandmother") was a wonderful woman - very attractive, smart, always dressed beautifully, and she spoke a wonderful French as well as Yiddish, Russian and Polish, and played the piano. I loved her so much. To me She was the grandma that my own grandma was not. Bobcha was a widow, I never knew her husband. She was the one who operated all the businesses.

Bobcha invited Feivel to come to stay at their house in Warsaw. After he came, Bobcha left for a vacation and Feivel and Manya were, at the ages of 22 and 20, left by themselves in this large house. As my Aunt Helen tells the story, Manya somehow got pregnant and they had to get married. When the first daughter, Baila, was born, Bobcha and the couple told everyone that she was premature.

If I think about this, I think Bobcha did this on purpose. She wanted Manya to have Feivel as her husband. And he turned out to be a wonderful husband.

They lived in Warsaw until 1938. They were the smartest of the family. They sold the factory, sold the business and immigrated to Israel (which was Palestine at the time). They had two daughters, Baila and Hela.

Feivel and Manya lived in Rehovot. Feivel was a Zionist. They had a furniture store on Herzl Street and lived a nice life with their two daughters. When I arrived in 1950, they were the first relatives who knew me. Until that time, during the whole war and afterwards, until 1950, there wasn't a living soul who knew who I was.

Nathan, my father's youngest brother, was also very handsome. He was a bookkeeper. I really don't know how he met his wife, but I know that my aunt was very wealthy. Her family sold lottery tickets. I think that was a private business in Poland. Her family name was Wolanow (Volanov) and whoever is from Warsaw knew of that family. I don't recall her first name.

She was a sick woman. Nobody told Nathan about this. My father used to say when my uncle married her, that something was wrong with her. It turned out that she had tuberculosis. She never should have gotten married, but she did. They had one son, his name is David and he was born in Poland. His mother didn't raise the boy. He was raised with a wet nurse. Because of her illness, she never touched him and was only able to look at him with a mask on her face.

They had a summer home in Otvosk. They also had a home in Warsaw. She lived with Nathan, but she was very ill. The child had housekeepers and nannies to raise him. He went to private school. He was a very handsome boy. On the day before his Bar Mitzvah, his mother died.

Nathan, the father, took over the entire business and later remarried. I thought this woman was very nice, they never had any children. They had a trucking business which ran trucks from Warsaw to Bialystok. My cousin, David hated his stepmother. He belonged to Zionist Pioneers (Hashomer Hatzair). My Uncle Nathan, had a terrible time with him. He used to come home and take Nathan's suits and give them away. David said he didn't need so many suits.

David graduated from Jewish boys high school (gymnasia) in approximately 1936 and in 1938 went to Palestine to live on a kibbutz. The kibbutz is near the Syrian border. There he married a Jewish German girl. She is a doctor and he was an agricultural engineer. He became the "rosh" (head) of the kibbutz.

They had two boys. I remember being in Israel from 1950-1952. I visited him twice. He wanted me to stay there and I just could not do that. I said that I went through Hell and I wanted to live my life privately. That didn't sit well with him - he was not pleased.

I remember when I was there, I saw that the children did not live with the parents. When I was there, they brought one of the children into their room where they lived. I looked at David and asked "How does he know that you're his father when you don't live together?" David said, "That's how it is here." The wife was a very cold person. This is the visit that I remember with my cousin.

My Uncle Nathan sent David \$10,000 which David gave to the kibbutz. Nathan wanted to come to Palestine and his son said "Here you can't sit around and do nothing, you must learn a trade - this isn't Warsaw where you can collect money without doing anything." That was the reason that Uncle Nathan didn't go to Palestine. During the war, Nathan escaped to Russia and never came back. I have no idea what happened to him.

My father was the only one of his family who was an ordained rabbi. He went to the famous Shapiro Yeshiva. The rest of them were secular European people and weren't very religious.

Now that you know about all my father's family, let me add that the only ones who survived were my Uncle Feivel and Aunt Manya who went to Palestine and Aunt Helen who was already in the United States. All the rest of them, including their children, were killed during the Holocaust.

In my father's family, the men did well, but the girls didn't do so well. As girls, they couldn't just up and marry rich men. The brothers gave

them the dowry because their father had died. They weren't as wealthy and so they did the best they could.

My aunt, Cesia, who was a sweet, lovely lady, told me a story when I was about 12 years old. She said that she loved this wonderful man who was a violinist. He wanted to marry her without a penny. He wanted to leave Poland and come to the U.S. But, because she was younger than Regina, the family wouldn't allow this to happen.

He left Poland and she never forgot him. She married someone else and didn't have a very happy life. She had children. They had a small grocery store. I don't remember the circumstances under which she told me the story, I just remember that she did tell me this and I felt sorry that her husband, the man that she married, was not the one that she really wanted to be with.

Her husband was a widower with a little girl. They had 4 children together and I know that my father and the other brothers were always helping them. She was a lovely, intelligent, person and he was not the type she was dreaming about. To me, he was an ignoramus. Not vulgar, but just not refined.

Regina was a beautiful girl. Also, I feel, not happily married. The husband was a gambler. I don't remember his name or their last name. They had a fabric store and because of his gambling, there was always a shortage of money. Again, the brothers helped this family as well. They had three children. All of them were very bright - in private Jewish high schools. They were all on scholarship. The children were a little older than I was.

One of the other uncles who was also in Yeshiva but not a rabbi was in danger of being taken to the Army. This part of Poland was ruled by Russia and service in the Army was for 25 years. Because of this, the family sent this son to America to avoid 25 years of service. This was about 1919, sometime just after World War I. He married in the U.S. and had two children. In 1930 or 32 in the depression, he lost everything and then died. He was very young.

His son, Sol Zyskind served in the Army in World War II as a pilot. He was shot down in 1940 in Belgium and killed.

The sister, Ethel, I met when I came to America in 1952. Ethel lived in New York. She was wonderful, but I couldn't communicate with her at first. I spoke Yiddish, Polish, Russian and German and a little French. But she only spoke English. Later, I learned to speak English and was able to converse with her.

She was married and had 2 children. Her daughter was married and had one child. She divorced her husband and my cousin, Ethel, took care of the child. She gave up her teaching position to take care of the child. This was too much for her. She had to go for therapy. She was also on medication. One day I received a letter that she was planning to visit me in Chicago. Before she came, I got a telephone call from our Aunt Helen telling me that she had taken an overdose of the medicine and died. I think she was in her 40's at the time. She was a beautiful lady.

So this was really a tragic family. My uncle died very young during the depression. His wife died in 1938. I never knew her. Then their two children, Sol and Ethel died so tragically as well. I don't know Ethel's daughters well, I never kept in touch with them.

My Aunt Helen was the youngest of my father's sisters. She was a bookkeeper in Warsaw. Because they were afraid she would go out with some boys that they wouldn't approve of, the parents sent her to America to the older brother and asked him to take care of her.

She married a wonderful man named Morris Feinblant. I met them when I came here. She was the happiest of all the sisters. Her husband adored her. He was from Russia and came here as a young boy. He had a big diploma which said that he had finished school in Russia. They had a business in Manhattan and they lived a typical American life - making \$100 and spending \$110. But she really enjoyed life and had a really full life.

They had one son named Irving. He lives on Long Island now and is approximately 77 years old. I talk to him now and then. He is an

engineer, his wife is a teacher. They have 3 children, two are married and I attended the weddings, of course. The daughter is a violinist, playing in the symphony orchestra. One son is a chemist and the third child, also a boy, is an accountant.

CHAPTER 2

My mother, Fraida Kuperman, very young when she married my father, Moshe Zyskind. I believe no more than 16. My father was 17. This was an arranged marriage. Once the marriage was arranged by my grandparents, they wanted the bride and groom to see each other before the wedding day, so they arranged for the children to each walk with their parents in the park. The plan was that the two families would see each other and this way the children would be able to get a look at their intended.

Unfortunately, my father ran away and the plan didn't work. My mother told me that his mother was calling "Moshe, come here". He didn't listen and just ran away. When they got home, my grandma asked her son how he liked the future wife. He said she was "okay", but on further questioning, it turned out that he had actually looked at his future mother-in-law, not his future wife. So he really had no idea what my mother looked like before the wedding.

So in reality, the first time, my father ever *really* saw my mother was on their wedding day.

They got married in 1905 in Warsaw. I remember seeing the Kesuba, the wedding contract, which was beautiful. My mother, remembering the wedding, recalled some songs they played and sang them for me. I believe they had a big wedding.

My parents lived with my maternal grandparents for many years after they were married. My grandparents had a very large home with an apartment on the second floor where my family lived. In fact, this is the first home I remember.

My maternal grandparents supported the couple completely for 10 years. I'm not sure exactly what my father did during this time. I assume he studied at least part of the time.

Let me tell you a little bit about my mother and father. This won't be easy for me to say, because this involves the two people who I loved the most in my life as a child. As I mentioned before, my father was an

ordained rabbi. Beside being a rabbi, he was a great educator, a man who studied all his life. He spoke, wrote and read Russian, German, Polish, Hebrew and Yiddish fluently and, in addition, he spoke a little French. My father believed that one should read everything that was written, even some ideas that were forbidden for orthodox Jews to read. Specifically, Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher who converted to Christianity, was totally off limits for Jewish orthodox people to study. But my father believed you should read everything and read his writings.

I remember in 1939, my father began to study Einstein and I said that so few people could understand his writings. My father replied that you can't say you don't understand the writings if you haven't tried to read them. That's the kind of person he was and part of the reason I adored him so much.

My mother was the sweetest person - really an angel, a beautiful person and a wonderful mother. She would do anything and everything for her children. I never remember her raising her voice or doing any harm to anyone. She gave a lot of money to tzedukah.

When my mother was young, she had typhoid and it left her with some difficulties. Even though her whole family had a good education, it was difficult for her to study and keep up because of the problems caused by the illness.

She adored my father and looked up to him very much. If I asked my mother a question that she wasn't sure of, she would always tell me to ask my father. My mother always deferred to my father, feeling that he was more intelligent. She dressed beautifully and kept a lovely house and my father treated her like a China doll. Their marriage was a very good one.

My parents had four children. In 1908, my oldest brother, Itzhak, was born. In 1915, my younger brother, Chaim, was born. Supposedly, there was one more child born before me who died. This child was never spoken of in our home. In fact, I only learned about this child after the war when my cousin told me about it. I was born in 1926

and was the only daughter and last child in the family. I was called Baila after my mother's grandmother.

My oldest brother, Itzhak, was a very bright person. It wasn't easy for a Jewish boy to get into the polytechnic institute (similar to IIT), but he got in. He graduated from the institute and became an electrical engineer. He never got married. He moved out of the house a few years before the war. During the war he came back and lived with us.

My other brother, Chaim, was a wonderful person. He worked in a machinery parts business that my parents opened for him. He was very happy there.

There was a draft in Poland, and Itzhak, because he was a college graduate, would have entered the army as an officer. So, because they didn't want too many Jews as officers, they never called him up for service. Chaim, by the age of 21, was called to army service. My parents were very upset at the prospect of his going off to the army because of the anti-Semitism in Poland. My father went to the head rabbi and they blessed my brother. On the day of his medical exam, my father went to the shul and prayed and they burned candles at home hoping this would help keep him out of the army.

Of course, Chaim was strong and healthy and was inducted into the army. He went to the army a few months before Pesach in 1937. While he was in the army, he had a dream about a street where a doctor lived. Supposedly, this doctor could help people avoid military service. When he awoke, he looked up the doctor and actually found him on that street. This was a Jewish doctor who understood the plight of Jewish men in the army and how difficult it was for them.

The doctor discovered that, even though Chaim wrote with his right hand, he was really left-handed. At that time, they only took right handed people into the army. The doctor proposed a simple solution - do everything with your left hand. That way, they will discover that you're left-handed and hopefully, let you go home. And that's exactly what happened.

The family was sitting at our Pesach seder and heard a knock on the door. The maid opened the door and there stood Chaim, unrecognizable because his head was shaved. He had civilian clothes and told us how he was released from service. Everyone was so grateful and excited to have him home. This made our holiday even better than before.

Chaim went back to his business and life went back to normal for everyone. One day, I asked Chaim to stop in to a grocery store to buy me some raisins I had seen. When he came home with them, he thanked me. I had no idea why he was thanking me.

A few weeks later, he asked me to come to a coffeehouse. I didn't understand why, I was only 11 years old at the time. At the coffeehouse, he was with a young lady. He told me that he met her in the grocery store while he was buying my raisins.

The three of us went to a play and took the young lady home in a carriage. That's when he asked me what I think of her and told me that he loved her and wanted to marry her. My father didn't want them to marry because, as Poland was a very class-conscious society and she was not in the same class as us, he was against the marriage.

My brother told my father, a few days later, that he wanted to bring the girl home to introduce her to the family. My father was against this. My brother pointed out to my father that he had said that this girl was a wonderful saleslady and how much he liked her. My father agreed that she was a good saleslady but added that the tavern likes a drunk, because he brings in money, but certainly doesn't want him as a son-in-law. My brother was terribly hurt. He left the house.

After this I went to my father and talked to him. I was very nervous to do this because children were not supposed to contradict their parents in those times. But I had a special relationship with him and I knew I had to say this. I said, "assume that he doesn't marry this girl and marries someone else. He'll never be happy and he'll always blame you." In addition, I told my father that she was a nice girl.

My father looked at me with tears in his eyes. He said, "My child, G-d gave me some children, but even G-d makes mistakes. He gave me a son who should wear a skirt (meaning he wasn't so smart) and gave me a daughter who should wear pants (meaning she's smart). " But after this, he relented and accepted the young lady into our family.

Chaim brought the girl home. She had a father and 4 sisters. They were poor people so we made the wedding. My brother bought an apartment and they were very happily married. They had a baby in the beginning of 1939 - a beautiful little girl.

CHAPTER 3

My first memories are approximately at the age of 3 or 4 years old. I remember a wedding. It was either my mother's cousin or my oldest cousin. It was winter and I remember that my parents didn't want to take me to the wedding. However, they prepared my clothes for the wedding just in case they would change their mind. They put me to sleep for a nap and when I awoke I saw the clothes and began crying that I wanted to go. I was a very spoiled little girl and finally, they decided to take me with them. We had a maid and she and my mother helped dress me for the wedding.

To this day, I remember the dress. It was white satin, with short sleeves and a blue ribbon around the waist. I had blue ribbons in my long hair to match. It was winter, so I wore a warm coat. My parents were all dressed up as well and this was the first and only time I saw my father wearing a shtreimel. Because there was snow on the ground, we went to the wedding in a sleigh.

I remember the music and the bride and the dancing. I remember the chupah. It was outside on a terrace. For the dinner, some of the less religious people were sitting in the big ballroom with men and women together. The orthodox women were sitting in the big ballroom as well, but the orthodox men were in a separate room.

The hall was very beautiful with a wonderful orchestra including a violin and piano. In the big ballroom the couples and the children were dancing to the music. In the second room the men were not dancing. The wedding was so beautiful, that to this day, I don't believe I've ever seen such a beautiful wedding.

My childhood was very pleasant. I do not remember my brothers being children. To me, they were always grown-up. Remember that the brother who was closest to me in age was still eleven years older than I was.

One time, I went with the maid, Maria, to the Vistula River. Her boyfriend was there and she spoke to him. I asked her if there were

some fish in the water. In that particular place, it was very deep. I jumped into the water trying to catch a fish and I almost drowned. A man who was close to the shore jumped in and saved my life. I heard a great deal about this from my parents. This is probably the reason that I am very frightened of water. I never did learn to swim.

As a child, my father taught me how to read and write and by the age of 5. I was reading and doing some writing. I went to a private pre-school at the age of 4. My parents did this because my brothers were so much older and this would give me the opportunity to be around young children.

By the age of 7, I began school. I never went to first or second grade but began with third grade. Because my father taught me to read and write, I was able to pass a test and skip first and second grades.

Because we lived in a predominantly Christian neighborhood, the public school that I went to had only 2 Jewish children in my class. Schools in Poland were open 6 days a week, including Saturday. Sunday was the only day off. In Jewish neighborhoods, however, Saturday was the day off and everyone attended school on Sunday. My father wanted me home on Saturday for Shabat and he arranged with the principal of the school for me to take Saturdays off. The principal said this was permissible if I was able to keep up with the class.

About 2 weeks after I began school, I was introduced to Polish anti-Semitism. The teacher told everyone in the class that they must use their given names and not nicknames that they were called on the street. My nickname was Basia, which was a very Polish name. My given name was Baila - a very Jewish name.

Because I had to use this name, the children realized that I was Jewish and those who were my friends, playing and talking with me one day, began making fun of me and making anti-Semitic remarks.

This upset me very much. I came home crying and swearing I wouldn't go to school any more. Because of this, my parents decided to send me to Jewish private school called Paprocka (Paprotzka) Gymnasium. The school had a number that I remember to this day. We wore it on our

coat or dress. The number was 152. The younger children wore a blue number and the older ones in the last two years of high school, wore a red number.

This school included elementary, jr. high and high school. The school was private and attended by only Jewish children, but it wasn't a religious school and we didn't learn religious subjects or Hebrew and Yiddish.

My years in school were pretty happy. The school was fine, but, as the time went on, I became aware of more and more anti-Semitism in society at large and in my own neighborhood specifically. There were very few Jews in our area, but there was a shul and I heard from time to time at shul that a Jew would be roughed up or bothered by anti-Semites.

Many Jews had businesses at this time. There was a section of Warsaw that was populated mostly by Jewish businesses. I remember Swientokrzyska (Shventokshista) Street which had bookstores, all owned by orthodox Jews. They had all kinds of books, not just Hebrew. Sometimes they had signs in the window, sometimes there was nothing outside, but in 1935 a new law was instituted which forced all businesses to write the name of the owner on the front of the business.

This was done specifically so Poles could identify Jewish businesses and boycott them. The same year, I think in the winter, one night, all the windows in the Jewish bookstores were broken. Everyone knew that Polish anti-Semites did this, but nobody was ever found or arrested. Either at the end of 1937 or the beginning of 1938, the mayor of Warsaw made a statement saying that even though beating Jews was illegal, boycotting Jewish businesses was fine with him.

At that same time, another anti-Jewish law set a quota for the amount of meat that could be slaughtered under rabbinic law, thus severely limiting the amount of kosher meat available to the Jewish population. Again, a law strictly to make life more difficult for Jews.

Our situation was a little different from some of the other people. As I said, we lived in a predominantly gentile neighborhood. My father

always tried to help the people in the neighborhood. These people, while they might want to harm other Jews, considered us "their Jews" and would do nothing to harm us. Still, they didn't do much to help us either.

By this time, we were hearing about Jews being attacked all over Warsaw. It wasn't safe in some parks or on many streets.

In that same year, at the University of Warsaw, where there was always a quota for Jews, things began to deteriorate as well. The Jewish students were told to sit on the left side of the classroom. The significance of the left side is because Jews were thought to be leftists politically and Communist-leaning. The Jewish students objected to this and many fights broke out. In the end, the Jewish students were forced to sit separately and fighting continued among Jewish and non-Jewish students.

The professors and administration turned their heads away from this and wanted nothing to do with it. They pretended not to see any of it.

In the same year, 1938, we began to hear news from Germany that Jews who had lived in Germany many years, but didn't have German citizenship, would be sent back to the country where they were born. This meant that many Jews who had been born in Poland but spent most of their lives in Germany, would have to return to Poland. In fact, these people were physically thrown out of Germany.

Many times this separated families. For example, a husband who was born in Poland and a wife who was born in Germany would be separated.

We also heard very bad news about Hitler's regime. We heard about Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, when Hitler's thugs ran wild destroying Jewish businesses and burning books as well as entire synagogues and preventing anyone from coming to the aid of the Jews.

Because of what was happening in Germany and because of the anti-Semitism in Poland, many Jews wanted to liquidate their businesses and get out of Poland as soon as possible. Unfortunately, no country would

accept the Jews. In addition, it was very difficult to get an exit visa to leave Poland.

At this time, if a Jew could find a place that would accept him, he could get out of Poland. My uncle, Faval and my father had visas for Palestine. My uncle liquidated his whole furniture business, sold his apartment and left Poland with his family.

My father tried to do the same thing, but it took him a lot longer and we weren't able to escape.

September 1, 1939 is a day I remember vividly. It was a beautiful, sunny Friday, I was walking down the street on the way to buy books for school. As a young girl, I was singing - something I loved to do. I stopped into a bakery and bought a piece of cake to eat.

Suddenly, I heard and saw lots of airplanes flying in the skies over Warsaw. My first thought was that these were Polish airplanes doing training exercises. But these were not Polish airplanes, they were German. I heard noises, not knowing exactly what they were. I was frightened and didn't know what to do; so I ran home.

At that moment the war began. We had been hearing talk about war, but we were not prepared for it when it began.

My father was home, as well as my oldest brother and, of course, my mother. My father thought the war wouldn't take too long, and that it would be over quickly, but that possibly we would have to change our lifestyle somewhat. But he was optimistic that we would survive and that life would soon come back to normal. How wrong he was!

The Germans knew the Jewish neighborhoods and targeted them, bombing Jewish apartment buildings and businesses before any other.

At this time, my brother Chaim who was married and had a little child, lost his apartment in the bombing. In fact, Chaim, his wife and the child came out of the bombing with one diaper - everything else was destroyed. They came to us to live at this time.

My grandmother's apartment building had been bombed as well and she came to live with us.

Luckily, our apartment had not been bombed. So, we now had 8 people living in our house. Poland was occupied by the Germans in about 3 weeks. Warsaw, itself, was fighting a little longer, but in a month, the Germans came to Warsaw.

When the Germans marched into Warsaw, I was in the house as was my entire family. We were very frightened about what would happen. We talked and prayed and tried to understand what had happened and what would happen to us in the future.

Many new laws were instituted. One of the first was to close all Jewish schools. No Jewish child was allowed to go to any school. A few months later, Jews were told they had to give up all their valuables: gold, silver, antiques, furs. If you refused to give these things up, you could be punished by death. We gave away a little and kept some things because it would be impossible for us to live if we didn't have these things to sell.

With the next law, we had to give away our radios and telephones, leaving us with no communications. Everything was punishable by death. Most people gave a little away and held back some things to insure their own survival.

With the money that we had left, we bought some food - necessities. There was no bread. My older brother, Itzhak, was standing in line to get bread during the bombing. A piece of shrapnel hit his leg and he was wounded. Some people brought him home.

My other brother, Chaim had his business destroyed, so he was without a business or a place to live. A couple of months after the Nazis came to Warsaw, Chaim, at my father's urging, went to the site of his former business and tried to salvage some of the metal pieces of the machinery he once had. He thought, perhaps he could sell this as scrap metal and get some money for food. While he was doing this, the Nazis found him and beat him so severely that we couldn't even recognize him when he came to our apartment later that evening.

He never spoke of this incident, but he was never the same person again.

At the same time, my older brother, Itzhak who had been hit by a piece of shrapnel, was suffering with an infection in his leg. We found a doctor who told us that we must amputate his leg or he would die. Itzhak would have none of this and said he would rather die than have his leg cut off. A very strange accident occurred a few days later.

It was quite crowded in the house and sometimes people were in each other's way. Itzhak wasn't walking well because he was in pain and I didn't realize that he wanted to sit down. I took the chair away and he fell. He hit his leg and was screaming in pain. At this time the sore opened and all the pus came out. The whole family began to help clean his wound. In the end, this was probably the best thing that could have happened, as the infection was cleaned. Even though the shrapnel in his leg was never removed, he was able to walk again after he recovered.

During this time we were spending money, but no money was coming in to the household. After Itzhak was feeling better, he decided that in order to help get some money for the family and being an electrical engineer, he would build a mill to grind grain or corn and possibly this would bring in a little money. He built the mill in a burned out building so as not to alert anyone to what he was doing. This was illegal according to the occupation laws of the Nazis.

One day, before he began to use the mill, some people told us that the Germans knew about his mill and were looking for him. If they caught him he could be arrested, and possibly killed. When Itzhak came home, we told him about this and, knowing what could happen to him, he decided not to go back to the mill.

He stayed at home a few hours, packed a little suitcase, kissed us all goodbye, and left Warsaw to save his life. He planned to go to Russia where he could get away from the German army. After he left a Nazi SS man and a Polish policeman came to find him. After checking the house, they both left, which was a small miracle in itself that they didn't harm any of us.

I never saw my brother again. After the war, I tried for many years to find out his fate, but to this day, I do not know what happened to him. Until a few years ago, I never said Kaddish for Itzhak because I always was dreaming and praying that somehow, somewhere, I would find him alive. But I finally realized that by now, he would be a man in his 90's and so I decided I must now say Kaddish for him.

The situation went from bad to worse. In January, 1940, two SS men came to our apartment. They decided that they liked our place and wanted to live there.

I do not remember if they gave us a few hours or a whole day to leave our place, but we were kicked out and allowed to take only the few things we could carry with us. We were not allowed to take any of the furniture, paintings, rugs or anything from the house.

Luckily, a friend of my father's in a Jewish neighborhood, Ceglana 19, had an empty apartment because the people who lived there left for Russia. We were allowed to move in. It was a pretty nice place. We had three rooms and a kitchen with running water, a toilet and even a bath, which for Warsaw, was a luxury apartment. We didn't have our apartment, but were allowed to use the furniture in the apartment.

All of our family came to live in this apartment. There were seven of us: My father, mother, brother Chaim and his wife and child, my grandmother and me. No money was coming in. Whatever money we had we spent on food. We were selling jewelry, piece by piece. We saw that there was no possible way a baby could survive in Warsaw. There was no milk and my niece's chances were not good.

We discussed this situation and my father and mother decided the best thing to do was send Chaim and his family to the village his wife came from. Possibly in this small town where she had family, they would be able to find food for the baby.

So Chaim and his family left Warsaw. I never saw my sister-in-law or the baby again. I did see my brother under terrible circumstances, which I will describe later.

Warsaw was no longer the city that I remembered as a child. All the things I loved about Warsaw were forbidden for Jews. We couldn't use public transportation, we had to walk in the street if a German was passing by. Normal life was gone. Most of our rights, our possessions and our freedoms were taken from us. We were forced to wear white armbands inscribed with a blue star of David to identify us as Jews.

In addition to the tangible things that were taken from us, every time they took away something else, a bit of our dignity and self-confidence were taken with it. All of my dreams were taken away. I didn't see a future any more and began to lose my belief in the goodness of human beings. As a young girl with a boundless future I saw the world in many beautiful colors. Now I saw everything in black.

We could not see the beauty of the city any more. All we knew was hunger and our only thoughts were how to get some money or food to survive another day.

In 1940, my grandmother, Esther (my father's mother) died of natural causes. She was in her 70's or 80's. We were able to give her a normal burial.

At this time I was about 16 and I decided I needed to do something to help the family. My father and mother had never done any manual labor in their lives.

I want to say that because I skipped first and second grades, and because I attended a private school, I had more education than the average 16-year-old. Since no schools for Jewish children were allowed to remain open, I decided to begin tutoring young children for which I was paid a little bit of money.

I worked about 11 or 12 hours a day doing this to be able to bring some money into the house.

Barbara's Story

Chapter 4

Around the middle of 1940 the Judenrat was formed. This was a committee of prominent Jewish men who were attempting to deal with the political, social and economic conditions for Jews which were deteriorating every day. The head of the Judenrat was named Chernikov. He was one of the most dedicated, caring people I knew. He truly had a Jewish soul and a Jewish heart. He tried to help the people, even though he was used by the Nazis to carry out many of their outrageous demands of the Jews. Sadly, later he would come to a tragic end.

In the beginning of 1941, the Nazis decided that all the Jews had to live in a ghetto. Actually, the Jews were physically building the walls of the ghetto themselves. Jews who were not living in the ghetto had to move into the ghetto and were required to exchange apartments with a Pole who had an apartment in the ghetto. No attention was paid to the size or equity of the exchange. So someone with a very large apartment could easily be required to exchange it for a one room apartment without any compensation.

The ghetto was the poorest Jewish neighborhood in the city. The ghetto area originally held 100,000 people. At its height, the Warsaw Ghetto contained 500,000 people, so you can imagine how horrible conditions became.

The ghetto. I know a great deal has been written about the Warsaw Ghetto, but there are no words to adequately describe the horror and tragedy that took place on such an enormous scale. This was a place unfit for human habitation. How can I express my own feelings? I felt that I was going to a prison from which I would never escape. A place that reminded me of the Dark Ages. I didn't think in the these modern times century that people were capable of treating other people in such an inhuman manner. I never will forget the smell, the cries, the dead people on the street. You had to walk around these dead bodies which were laying on the sidewalk, to get where you were going.

The children - they looked like blown up balloons with yellow faces - so sick they were not even able to cry any more.

Now, when I see the starving children in Africa, it reminds me of the babies in the Warsaw Ghetto. I thought, even if I survive all of this, how could I ever be myself again! What kind of human being would I be after seeing so much tragedy? How could I ever be the same person I was before?

I remember the moment they closed the ghetto. I was standing on the balcony of our apartment and crying and asking God, "Why, why is this happening to us? God - WHERE ARE YOU?", because there was nobody else to ask.

At this time, the Nazis gave food stamps to the whole population - for Poles and Jews. The difference was that on our stamps there was a big "J". We also got about 25% of the amount the Poles were getting. What we were allowed to get, we had to pay for as well. We had to buy food on the black market because this amount of food was not enough to survive. The black market was very expensive.

The black market food was brought to the ghetto through basements in bombed out buildings. The smugglers were able to make a lot of money but this was very dangerous for them even though they were not Jewish. There were some Jewish smugglers as well. In fact, all smugglers risked their lives.

I should mention also the little children who were able to smuggle food into the ghetto from the Aryan side. They did this in an ingenious way. The wall around the ghetto was all brick. The children went with a companion to a corner of the wall that was not heavily guarded. They loosened a few bricks, removed their armbands and crept quietly over to the Aryan side while the companion replaced the bricks. These children were usually around 8 or 9 years old. Old enough to understand what they had to do, but small enough to sneak through. Then they walked the streets begging or looking for food. If they were successful, they returned to the ghetto undetected. In this way, they were able to keep their families alive. Of course, many of the children

were caught and murdered by the guards. But many families were in such dire straits that they felt there was no other choice.

Many people did not have money to purchase food. This was when we began to see people fighting each other for food. The result was that many people starved to death.

Jews were required to wear a white armband with a blue star of David in the middle. If you were caught without this, you would be killed. I would like to explain a little bit about why we wore this armband and the circumstances of the time. In Poland, going back many generations, everyone had to register new births with the authorities. It was required to give your religion on this form. Therefore, the authorities knew everyone's religion. When the Nazis took over, of course, it was easy for them to recognize the more religious Jews such as Chasidim, because of their unique clothing, but secular Jews were much more difficult to recognize. In this regard, many Poles helped the Germans identify who, indeed were Jews. The Poles knew it was especially good for them to point out a Jew without an armband. This would give the Pole a reward from the Nazis such as extra food,. Some of the Poles would do this without any reward because of their anti-Semitism.

In addition, when we came to pick up our food stamps, we were required to wear the armband by law. When you announced your name, it was immediately evident that you were a Jew and leaving the armband at home was punishable by death.

Of course, there were some Polish people who wouldn't point out Jews and some who even helped the Jews. These people risked their lives and were very unique.

Even though the life in the ghetto at this time, 1940 and 1941, was harsh and very difficult, there still was some cultural and religious life. Some actors from the Jewish Theatre cleaned up a barn and put on great performances which I remember to this day. This was actually the first time I'd ever seen a Jewish play and I was really impressed.

My mother was a great housekeeper and cook and was able to make a wonderful meal from almost nothing. But, slowly, our resources were being depleted. We were selling jewelry, one piece at a time. Our situation was getting worse every day. No money was coming in and we were running short of valuables to sell for food.

I realized that I needed to do something to try to bring in money so we wouldn't starve to death. I knew some people with small children and approached them. Knowing the schools had been closed, I asked if they would want me to tutor the children for a small fee. They agreed and after a while they recommended me to other people who wanted their children tutored. After a few months, I was working 10-12 hours a day at tutoring. I was very tired, but, at least, I was making enough money to buy necessities so the family could survive. My biggest reward was not money, but to see bread on the table and know that I was able to help my family survive.

I knew that my father was capable of teaching Hebrew subjects and language to the children, but he would never ask for work. I came to him and asked him to take the children I was tutoring and teach them Hebrew. I said they would pay for this and he would be doing a mitzvah (good deed) because of that. I, on the other hand, told the parents of the children that they would have to pay me for the Hebrew tutoring. I collected all the money and for a little while, that helped us keep from being hungry.

I will never forget Rosh Hashana-Yom Kippur, 1940. All religious services were banned and meetings of any kind, secular or religious, were strictly prohibited. All infractions were punishable by death.

We were living on Ceglana Street and my father secretly brought one Torah from the synagogue and invited his friends, orthodox Jews, to come pray with us. My father conducted the services and blew the shofar. That was the first time I ever heard him do this and to this day I vividly remember his beautiful voice. Each year when I hear the cantor on the high holidays, it reminds me of my father and the wonderful service he conducted in spite of the many obstacles in his path.

During Yom Kippur, while my father was conducting his service, I took a walk outside. I came upon a horrible scene - SS men walking with a group of orthodox Jews. There were about 20 men in the group. The man in the lead was wearing a tallis and carrying the Torah. One of the Nazis shot and killed the man carrying the Torah before my eyes. The others were walked to the Umschlagplatz. From there they were either killed or sent to a concentration camp. After the men and the Nazis left I saw the Torah, our holy book, just laying there in the street. Watching this scene, I became hysterical. I was afraid to be there and ran home. When my father saw how upset I was, he stopped the service. I told the worshippers what I'd just witnessed and there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Everyone said a special prayer for those people and for the man who was killed. Then my father resumed the service. He said that God was expecting this of us, and he continued to pray. I asked my father, "Is this the same God you're praying to that let this horror happen?" He had no answer - he just kissed me and said, "I still hope we'll survive, my child." That was the Yom Kippur I'll never forget.

My father, who loved his books so much, had a first edition of Maimonides works. He had all the volumes except one. He was looking for this volume for many years before the war. One day when we were still on Ceglana Street, my father went to buy some food. When he came back, he was all smiles. He didn't return with food, but with that missing volume of Maimonides works. He had traded the bread for this book - that's how important books were to him. I told him, "Dad, we need the bread." He told me, "We won't starve without the bread one day, but that book, that book, it's a treasure."

There was a newspaper printed in the ghetto. Even though this was illegal, it afforded us the opportunity to get some news of what was going on inside the ghetto.

It pains me to tell this, but there were Jewish police who policed the Jews in the ghetto. People would pay great sums of money to get their son a position as a policeman because they thought his life would be easier. Before he left, my brother Chaim was asked by the federation and the Germans to become a policeman. He hid so as not to be found

because he didn't want this position. As I said, he left Warsaw shortly thereafter.

At the beginning, the job of the policemen was to control traffic and make sure that everyone obeys the law. Later, the policemen did some very ugly things. When I describe the liquidation of the ghetto, I will tell about these policemen.

After a while, the situation worsened and people didn't care about tutoring, they were interested in merely surviving. This was, of course, the end of my tutoring job and I temporarily lost the ability to help my parents.

One day I was walking in the ghetto with a friend named Sapka. We were stopped by two Nazis. They took us to an office and told us to clean the office. I asked for some rags to use for cleaning and he told me to take off my underwear to use for rags. I did this and washed the floor with my underwear. I didn't wash the floor to his satisfaction so he beat me with a whip. I lost consciousness. I have no idea who brought me out of that office but when I regained consciousness I was at home with my mother and father standing over me. He beat me so badly that, to this day, I still have scars from that beating. That was my first experience with the Nazis. The important thing is that I survived.

Our apartment had a balcony and from this balcony you could see the Aryan side. I previously described the smuggling going on from the Aryan side. The Jewish smugglers used our balcony to communicate with the Poles. I asked my father why they didn't pay us for using our balcony. If the Nazis found out about this, we would be the ones to suffer. My father said that these people were risking their lives to bring a little food to the Jews and he couldn't ask them for money.

By this time, people had no money to pay for tutors and I lost most of my previous tutoring jobs. The family was becoming increasingly desperate so I asked the smugglers to help me make a little money. They told me that if I wanted to sit in the basement where the food was being smuggled in and out, I would be able to sell some food to the smugglers themselves and would be able to charge more than it would

cost me to buy this food. In this way, I could make a little money. Of course, this was very risky for me. If I was found by the Nazis I would be killed. But I felt I had to take this risk to bring some money into the house. I did not tell my parents what I was doing. I told them I was taking care of an old lady and staying in her house some nights and that she was giving me money for this. This all took place in 1941.

The Nazis would come in without warning or reason, and take some people out of the ghetto and kill them. These were random killings. We thought the situation in the ghetto had become unbearable. What we didn't know, was that things would get much worse.

The ghetto was shrinking because people were dying of starvation and sickness. There were very few doctors and only one hospital which was operated by German doctors. Whoever went in there never came out alive. Needless to say, no matter how sick people were, they wouldn't go there.

The food that was smuggled in was so expensive that almost nobody could afford it. There was no coal, no medicine, no soap. Because of this there was a terrible epidemic of typhoid. By the end of 1941, I was ill with typhoid. My parents didn't call a doctor because they knew if they called the doctor I would be taken to the hospital and that would be the end of me. I was very ill for a very long time - about 3 months. I was delirious. I remember that I was hemorrhaging from my nose and my ears. My parents were standing near me and my mother was crying and saying, "my baby's dying". I prayed to G-d to help me. I said, "I'm so young, please G-d, let me live. I promise that the first 5 zlotys I get, I will give for charity." It was very bad.

My father put my feet up and my head down and I finally stopped hemorrhaging. But I lost consciousness again. When I did wake up, I saw that the apartment was almost empty. There was almost no furniture and all the clothing except for one set of clothes was gone.

At this time we were forced to leave this apartment. I saw a wagon piled with our few belongings including furniture and books. Someone, I don't remember who, put me on top of all this. They said, "It doesn't make any difference, she won't survive anyway." I don't remember who

pulled the wagon. I was in and out of consciousness at this time. We ended up in one ugly little room. The apartment had a few rooms, but in every room there was a separate family. This place was on Pawia Street. There was one bed, one table with three chairs, a stove and some dishes and a small cabinet. That was all we had. I didn't know what I could do for them. Because of the hemorrhaging I almost completely lost the vision in one eye.

I think I was over the typhoid, but I was so weak I could barely see or walk. My mother, who was such a beautiful lady, was not the same any more. My father as well. I don't remember how or from where, but we got a small amount of bread. We all slept in one bed. We were not clean because we had no way to clean ourselves.

I was a bit better, but my now my father had become ill. He was getting sicker and sicker. One night he called me to his bed and began talking to me - giving me advice and telling me things that made me begin to feel that he was dying. He told me where to find some papers and who to go live with and I cried and asked him why he was telling me these things. He said that we don't know what will happen and I want you to know these things.

He talked to me all night. He gave me advice on marriage. He told me never to seek money. To illustrate this he said, "If a horse has a bag of money, everyone will bow down to him, but when the money's gone, he's still nothing but a horse." He told me to be sure I married someone nice, that was the most important thing. ." He said to try to recognize that if you marry a bad person, it will come out in an argument or somehow when the person is angry. You won't be able to handle this, so you should beware and not get into this situation. He said, "An average apple from a good tree is better than a fabulous apple from a bad tree."

I must have fallen asleep early in the morning while sitting on a chair next to his bed. When I woke up, I wanted to give him some water to drink. He was in a coma, his eyes were closed. I didn't know what to do. My mother wasn't herself and seemed incapable of acting. So I ran out into the street, found a doctor's residence and begged him to come home with me and help my father. On the way home with the doctor,

somehow, I ripped the sleeve of my coat. I took this as a very bad omen. In our tradition, when a loved one dies, the family members tear a piece of clothing to signify that their heart is broken. This upset me very much and I hoped that I wasn't too late.

When the doctor looked at my father he knew even without checking him that it was too late to save him. I don't know how the doctor could have saved him because he didn't have any medicine available to him. The doctor said, "My child, he's dying. Why don't you let him die in peace?" Then he left.

I ran to my father's bed and began crying and screaming, "Don't die, don't leave me here, what should I do?" My father stretched his arms out and hugged me with tears coming from his eyes. He didn't say anything and a few moments later he died. He was 49 years old.

Up to this point, I saw catastrophes happening around me, but, somehow, I felt insulated. At the moment of my father's death, it became personal. I completely broke down. I no longer believed I would be able to survive and didn't know if I *wanted* to survive. To me, my life was over. I didn't care about anyone including myself. This moment changed my entire life.

I ran to my uncle, Rabbi Kuttner and asked him what to do. He told me not to worry that he would send someone. We had a plot in the cemetery, but we were unable to go to the cemetery because it was outside the ghetto walls. I didn't have any money and I didn't know what to do. Because so many people were dying every day, there was a wagon that went around and picked up all the bodies. They came around and picked up my father and he didn't even get a decent Jewish burial. To this day, I have no idea where he's buried.

After my terrible illness, I was so weak and miserable. I was left with my mother in this ugly, miserable little room. One suit of my father's was left. My mother went to sell the suit because there wasn't even a penny for a piece of bread. She sold it and got a few zlotys and those few zlotys were stolen from her on the way home. She came without the suit or the money. This seemed to take all the spirit out of her. She seemed to have death on her face.

I don't remember very much about what happened next. I only remember two horrible incidents for which I will never forgive myself. I don't know why I acted the way I did, I don't know what made me do this. I hurt the people I loved the most and it haunts me to this day.

Sometime after my father died, I ran away from the room we lived in. I don't remember when or why this happened. I do remember that I came to a grocery store in the ghetto and there was a woman who owned the store. She had a daughter who lived upstairs and she told me she would give me a little to eat if I would sleep in the store and bring food to the daughter. I'm sure that I went upstairs to give the daughter her food, but I have no memory of this.

One day while I was in the store, my mother came in. She looked so close to death, I knew she didn't have long to live. She asked me, with tears in her eyes, to take her to my aunt's house. I refused. I don't know why I refused. After that I have no memory of what happened with my mother.

The second incident also occurred in the store. My brother, Chaim who had left Warsaw, came back again after my father's death. He told me that in a dream he saw my father telling him that he was dead and that Chaim should come back to Warsaw to say kaddish (the prayer for the dead). I don't remember talking to him or asking him about the fate of his wife or child. He asked me to give him the food I was holding. He said, "I'm dying, please give me it." I just ran away.

Later, I was told that my mother had died at my aunt's house. She was 48. My brother died in the room we had. He was only 26 years old. I never went back to these places to try to see either of them.

I have spoken to doctors and rabbis about these incidents and they always tell me that, realistically, even if I walked with my mother, I couldn't have saved her from death. I know my brother would have died even if I had given him a piece of bread. They tell me that I am not to blame for their deaths, that I was little more than a child and in complete fear myself. I understand this intellectually, but I cannot forgive myself emotionally, no matter how much I try to rationalize it.

So really, what happened to me? God, I will never understand why I did it - why I acted the way I did toward the people I loved the most in this world. I must believe that my grief and fright caused me to act in a way I would never believe I could. I must believe that because I was on emotional overload, everything just shut down and I was unable to feel anything at all.

To this day, I pray God for forgiveness - how could I have ignored them in their time of need? I never go to bed without saying a prayer and also asking my mother and brother for forgiveness. I will never understand how it happened

It wasn't enough that the Nazis took my family, that I was starving and filthy, but they took away all my feelings and changed me into a half-animal. For making me act in this way, I will *never* forgive the Nazis.

CHAPTER 5

I think at this time I went into shock. I know there is a period that I simply don't remember. Even more upsetting is that I am unsure how long this period of time extended. My best calculations say it was four or five months. During this time I have absolutely no memory of anything that happened.

The next thing I can remember was walking along the street in the ghetto feeling extremely hungry and knowing I was dirty. I don't remember where I was before, where I slept, or when the last time I really washed myself was - everything was a complete blank. I know it was the winter of 1941-42 at this time, but I don't know what day or month it was. I was walking and thinking how I could get a piece of bread to eat. All I had left was my winter coat, which I was wearing. In it, there was a lining and I decided this was the only thing of value I had left to sell. I sold my lining to a smuggler and received a piece of bread.

I was holding the bread in my hand because there was nothing to put it in when, several minutes later, the "khoppers", young boys who stole food from people walking down the street, grabbed my bread and ran away with it. Because these boys were so hungry themselves, when they grabbed a piece of bread from someone, they would immediately shove it in their mouths and begin eating it. People saw the bread being stolen from me and tried to run and catch the boy. They tried to take the piece of bread that was still left away from him. I stopped the people, because I knew that this boy was as hungry as I was, or maybe even worse. I walked away in tears without the lining and without the bread. At this time I was 16 years old.

As I was walking along and crying, an older lady stopped me and asked me if I am Basha Zyskind and I said "yes". She told me that she knew my parents and I told her that I lost them and all my family and that I was by myself and didn't know where I could go or what to do. She mentioned to me that my Aunt Baila and her husband were still in the ghetto and I should go to her.

I went to Aunt Baila's and told her what happened to the family. She didn't know anything about this. We were both crying and feeling very sad. She shared her bread with me even though she didn't have much herself and told me to stay with her. I knew that she didn't have food to give me. Aunt Baila told me that she knew of a soup kitchen close to her apartment. She encouraged me to go there and try to get something to eat.

A Jewish organization ran the soup kitchen. They had been involved with other activities prior to this, but at this time, the most important thing was to save the children from starvation. I looked much younger than my 16 years and I thought I might be able to get some food there. When I went down there, they let me in and gave me some soup and a piece of bread. They told me that I could come every day for something to eat. I felt terrible, having to take food from the soup kitchen, but there was no other way to survive.

I stayed with Baila a few months and during this time she asked me to take some soup to my Aunt Sara who lived about 10 blocks away. I carried the soup to her place but she wasn't in her apartment. Some other people were now occupying the place and I was told that my Uncle Hershel, her husband, had died and that she was now staying in the basement. This was a dirty, filthy, basement, filled with rats and vermin, not an apartment. As I walked closer to it I could see how dark and scary the place was. I went in and saw my aunt lying on a cot. Her appearance frightened me. She had been a beautiful woman and now she was dirty and wild looking. She recognized me and tried to hug me and thank me for the soup. I was so frightened that I just ran away and left her there. Outside I cried hysterically, just thinking "is this really true, is this really what happened to all my loved ones." Where was God? People became animals and fought like animals. What had happened?

When I got back to my Aunt Baila, I told her about this. I couldn't stay with her much longer because her place was very small and I felt I was imposing on her too much. In this one small room there were 4 people - my aunt, her husband and two daughters. So I went back to Ceglana Street hoping that I would see one of my friends.

When I got there, most of the apartments had many more people in them than before the war. These were beautiful apartments at one time. I knocked on some doors and there were strange people in the apartments. Most of my friends were gone. I would never discover what happened to them.

Finally, I approached an apartment that had been occupied by the family of a friend of mine. My friend was not there, he had left Warsaw, but I found his older brother there. He asked me to come in and gave me some food. He was a policeman and had quite a bit more food than many other people. I sat and ate and talked with him for a while. I noticed that it was late and had gotten dark. I was fearful of walking alone at night in the ghetto and asked him if I could spend the night there. I had nowhere else to go.

This apartment had two rooms and I noticed that each room had a bed in it. I asked if I could sleep in the kitchen and he agreed to let me stay there. I went to sleep and in the middle of the night I woke up and became aware of my friend's brother touching me and trying to get into bed with me. I started to cry and said, "Please don't touch me." I was so frightened, I told him I was menstruating and that I was a virgin, that I was dirty. I tried every excuse I could think of and cried harder and harder. Finally, he left me alone.

I couldn't sleep any more and when the sun rose and I could see some light, I left. On the way out, in the back yard, I met Kuba, a friend of mine from the Ceglana Street group. I told him everything that had happened to me. He was very sympathetic and told me that his parents, who had a two-room apartment and running water, were out until the end of the day. He told me he would stay downstairs and watch so that nobody would disturb me and allowed me to go to his place and wash up. I washed up and felt a bit cleaner than before.

Kuba told me about an elderly woman next door who had some food and needed a companion to stay with her. I went to her apartment. She took me in as a companion because she was afraid to be alone. I thought I would stay with her and keep her company. Actually, she wanted a maid. She forced me to clean the windows and wash the floors and sleep in the cold kitchen. I had never done this sort of work

before and I probably wasn't too good at it. After a couple of weeks, she forced me to leave.

As I was leaving, about 1/2 a block away, I thought I saw a familiar face in one of the apartments. When I got closer, I realized that I didn't know any of these people. As I walked around the building, I noticed that there was an empty apartment. I went inside and there was nothing in the apartment except a trunk and a can filled with melted butter. I took the can of butter with me and left. I went to a small place where they were serving food. I asked them if I could trade some butter for soup. I gave them 4 tablespoons of butter and they gave me a bowl of soup. Another 4 tablespoons got me a piece of bread. I asked if I could sleep in this place and they allowed me to sleep in a cot in the corner. I slept with my can of butter attached to my arm so nobody would take it. I spent about a week in this place.

While I was staying in this place, I found out that the Nazis asked Mr. Chernikov, the president of the Judenrat to work with them and give them a list of people to be deported to "work camps". Mr. Chernikov must have known or at least suspected that the Nazis really wanted to exterminate these people. He rejected them and committed suicide. I am not certain, but I think the rest of his family, a wife and two children, committed suicide as well.

Another man, named Heller replaced Chernikov. Heller was from Lodz. This man worked with the Nazis and delivered people to them.

At this time I was still at the place I described trading butter for food. I heard that the Nazis wanted to resettle people from the Warsaw Ghetto in a small town in the Polish countryside. The Nazis said they would keep families together and they encouraged everyone to come to Umschlagplatz as a central meeting place. They said the trains would be waiting and every family would receive a loaf of bread and some jam.

As we know now, this was a ruse. However, people believed them. Even with all the deprivation they had caused and the cruel manner in which they treated us, nobody could believe that they actually intended to kill everyone - men, women and children. How could we NOT believe that

we were being resettled? Life in the ghetto was so terrible - this was our only hope. Nobody would allow themselves to believe that in the 20th century, this would come from a country like Germany, the most highly educated in all of Europe, a country that gave the world so many great writers, composers, and philosophers. Who could believe that these same people were capable of mass genocide? How could we believe that those intellectuals, those chemists and engineers were capable of producing a complete industry dedicated to killing people?

People by the thousands, believing the Nazis and hoping against hope that they were telling the truth, and knowing that they couldn't hold out much longer against hunger and disease in the ghetto, came to the Umschlagplatz.

I heard the news and went back to my Aunt Baila's house. We all talked about the offer and they decided to take it and asked me to come along as part of their family. For some reason, I didn't want to go. I have no idea why I said "no". The following day we said goodbye to each other and I never saw any of them again.

I remember one guy, his name was Rubinstein; he escaped from Treblinka somehow and returned to the ghetto. He ran through the streets screaming "they're gassing us, they're burning us". In the beginning, nobody believed him

However after some weeks, people in the ghetto began to be suspicious about what was happening to the people who had left for resettlement. Some people from the underground, (which consisted of Jews and non-Jews), followed a train and found that its destination was 80 miles from Warsaw at a death camp called Treblinka. This camp had been created specifically and solely for the purpose of killing people. The people were taken in cattle cars in the morning. When they were unloaded all their belongings were taken from them. They were sent to be gassed and from there their remains were taken to the crematorium and burned. The Nazis did this with such precision and clockwork that the trains were able to return empty to Warsaw that same evening.

So Rubinstein had not been crazy. He was trying to warn us. I was completely horrified, as was everyone in the ghetto, when we discovered the truth. Because people found out the truth, they, of course, stopped coming of their own free will.

Such was the Nazi thinking to exterminate every Jewish man, woman and child; so that even though the war was continuing and the Nazis needed men and equipment transported to all the fronts, their top priority was to send trains of Jews to their death in the camps.

CHAPTER 6

Since people now understood what their fate would be, nobody was coming on their own any more. Because of this, the Germans devised another way of getting people out of the ghetto. They began what were called Aktions. The Germans surrounded a square block with SS and sometimes used soldiers from the area such as Ukrainians or Lithuanians. They would take all the people residing in all the apartments in this square block out of their houses, beating and yelling as they did this. Nobody was exempt from this - young children, older people, sick people - all were included.

These people were loaded onto trucks and taken to Umschlagplatz where the cattle cars were waiting to take them to the infamous death camp Treblinka - a place from which nobody returned alive.

These Aktions began in the middle of 1942 and continued through the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April, 1943.

I remember walking on the street and again being hungry and not knowing where I would sleep at night. As before, an older woman stopped me. She recognized me. She asked me about my family. I told her that I had nobody - everyone was gone. She told me there was a lady in one of the nearby buildings who ran a grocery store. In the ghetto they received only enough food to sell on the food stamp rations that were given to people. It was not like a grocery store that we would think of today where you could go in and buy anything you wanted or where the owners would be making good sums of money. Even so, the people who sold groceries were better off because they always had food.

The older woman thought these people might need a baby sitter for their small daughter so they could stay in the store. She also felt that they might be willing to allow me to sleep somewhere in their place as well.

I went to an apartment on the third floor of a building and rang the bell. A woman answered but she would not let me in. I can imagine

now why she would be hesitant to let me in. I was very filthy and I'm sure they were afraid I would spread some disease to their family.

At the very time that I was standing at this door, I heard yelling, shouting, whistles, crying, screaming all around me and I knew that an Aktion was taking place on this very block.

I was very frightened and realized that I needed to get away from the third floor immediately. I began running down the stairs and when I got to the ground floor, I saw a basement with some little windows and decided this would be my only chance to hide. One of the windows was open and I jumped through it into the basement. This was not a huge basement, but a small room which was sectioned off from the rest of the basement.

One of the German soldiers saw me and started running after me and shooting. Luckily, I was not hit and, to my surprise, as I jumped through the window, I found that this room was filled with feathers. I landed in a pile of feathers and became completely covered by them instantly. The German continued to search and shoot, but I lay very still and he finally gave up and walked away from the basement.

While I was lying under the feathers, I heard horrible screaming and crying and shooting. I knew that some people were dead already. I laid there about 2 or 3 hours until it became absolutely quiet. I was afraid to go out before then, thinking that the Germans might still be there.

When I left the basement and walked to the back yard I discovered 3 bodies of people who had been killed in the Aktion. There was an eerie silence. Nobody was there - everyone had been taken away. As I was standing and trying to comprehend what had just happened, I saw another young girl emerge from another entrance of the building. She had obviously been hiding also. We were the only two who survived this Aktion.

Although I didn't know this girl, we cried and hugged each other for some time. Then I told her why I was in this area and suggested that we should go up to the third floor and check out the apartment I had

been sent to. I was pretty sure we would be able to find some food there.

We went to the apartment that had furniture, food and people's personal effects. The only thing missing were the people, who had been taken away. I never did get to see the baby who lived in this place, as they took the baby along with everyone else to the death camp.

We found some food and ate quite a bit. In fact, it was difficult to stop eating. There was bread and jam and some other food and we both just ate until we couldn't eat any more. Because we were so hungry, it was the first thing on our minds. After eating, we realized that we wanted to clean up a bit. The other girl was dirty, but not as filthy as I was. In addition to the dirt, I had feathers all over me now.

We found soap and there was still running water - not hot, but running and we both cleaned up as best we could. Our clothes were very bad. I threw mine out and began to look in the wardrobe for something to wear. We took all the women's clothes out, including underwear, and we found some things that we could wear, even though this woman was much taller than either of us. I took a scissors and cut the dress down to size. I even took some shoes which were quite big on me, but I managed to stuff them with paper to make them fit better.

We divided the remaining clothes between us and put them in four pillowcases - two for each of us. Then we left the apartment and began walking. At this time, there were actually two ghettos - a small one and a large one. We were in the small ghetto.

The other girl told me that she heard that the Germans had opened several factories in both the small and large ghetto. She told me that in the small ghetto there was a factory called Tebens, which made uniforms. In the big ghetto there was a broom factory, which was just called the broom factory, there was Schultz Factory, I believe also making uniforms.

These were huge factories with about 20,000 or more people working in them. All the workers were Jews. They received no wages, but only

some food. There were Jewish supervisors called Meinsters who dealt with the German bosses. I have no idea if the Meinsters received money, but they got food and supplies for the factories. All supplies were given by the Germans

There was also Vertifassung, which was not really a factory, but a group of Jewish people, supervised by the Germans who went into the apartments where Aktions had taken place, cleaned and packed all the valuables and all the clothing and sent them out of the ghetto to Germany.

There was a bridge connecting the small and large ghetto and as we were walking across this bridge, a young boy approached me and asked if he could carry the pillowcases for me because they appeared to be quite heavy. He was very polite and I was very happy that he wanted to help me. He took both pillowcases and the next thing I knew, he was gone. Now all the clothes that I had were gone. When I looked around I couldn't find the other girl, so I decided to proceed to Shwientojerska 32 which was the broom factory.

When I got there I saw an enormous building which took up an entire square block. There was a large court in the middle. Before the war, this had been the area of the furriers and clothing merchants. In the courtyard, there were many, many people. It turned out that the broom factory was just beginning to be organized. As I was walking in the courtyard, I began talking with some of the people. I said that I had heard about the broom factory opening and I would like to work there. As luck would have it, one of the men was a Meinster, a supervisor and he said that I could stay here and would begin work in a week. He gave me some food stamps and assigned me to an apartment of three rooms that I shared with 4 other girls.

For me, this was a blessing. For the first time, I had a place where I could sleep as well as food stamps, which allowed me to have more food than was given out generally in the ghetto. Certainly there wasn't enough food to actually fill your stomach, but at least I wasn't starving.

At this time, the entire Warsaw Ghetto had become much smaller. Many people had starved to death from lack of food, many had died of disease and many had been taken away to the death camps in the numerous Aktions which the Germans had used to liquidate the ghetto. Most of the people who were left were young. By this I mean teenagers and young adults in their twenties. You didn't see any old people and very few little children. By this time, the summer of 1942, the ghetto was very different than before. Originally, you had apartment buildings with people living in them. Now some apartment buildings in specific neighborhoods had been turned into factory complexes. On the inside there was the factory itself and the surrounding apartment buildings were living quarters for the workers. Each complex was surrounded by barbed wire and there were armed German guards watching all the time. Between the complexes was a sort of no-man's-land of bombed out skeletons of buildings and empty apartment buildings where it was forbidden to go.

At first, I was pleased that I would have a place to stay and more food and wouldn't have to roam the sidewalks in search of food and lodging. I also hoped that this would allow me to survive the war.

My job was quite difficult. I put brooms together by hand with wire. Our meinstor was not a mean person and even though he told us that we had a quota to meet, he never treated us badly.

A week after I began, in the middle of the work day, the SS came in accompanied by Ukrainians and Lithuanians in black uniforms. They called everyone down into the courtyard. We all assembled there and at that time, to my surprise and horror, there was a Selection. Hundreds of people were taken out and sent to Umschlagplatz and transported to Treblinka and other death camps. There didn't seem to be any reason why one person was selected and another passed over. I was lucky many times and was not selected. Of course, now this place was getting smaller and smaller like the ghetto itself.

One day, I was certain there was going to be a Selection so I stayed behind in the apartment and hid. I heard some children's crying outside and even though the window was covered, I peaked out and saw about 10 little children crying. These children were hiding in the surrounding apartment buildings and had been discovered. A Nazi was lifting them by their hair and shooting them dead. He killed each and every one of them and threw them in a pile. I began crying, but the sight of this incredible inhumanity made me so sick that I remember vomiting as well. This image haunts me to this day. This was not a human being, but an animal walking on human legs.

The following day I went back to work. For a few weeks after that there was quiet, but then the Selections began again. Something happened to me at this time that I consider one of several miracles that saved me.

I was in my apartment dressed in a nightgown, bathrobe and some houseshoes. All of a sudden, I heard the whistles and the hollering of the Nazis "alles raus" - all out - which was the beginning of a Selection. I really was trapped - there was nowhere to go. I heard them coming up and there was nowhere to hide, so I just went downstairs. We knew that there was a cattle car train waiting in Umschlagplatz that needed 150 people to fill up one of the cars and the Nazis were here to get them. There was already a line of people with Nazis in the front and back as well as some on the sides with dogs. We proceeded out into the street. I remember that it was a bright, sunny day. As we were being marched through the no-man's-land outside of the factory, I could swear I heard my father's voice saying to me "escape, my child".

I had no idea how to escape. I looked around and saw all of the dogs and guards, but, somehow, I listened to my father's voice. I saw a burned out store that we were passing and I ran from the group of people, trying to escape into the store. Several other people followed me into the store. As I entered the store and because of the bright sun outside, I could not see anything. I ran as far as I could. In the corner, I touched something metal. I just crouched down next to this thing and put my head down. I stayed there very still. I heard the

Nazis in the store, hollering, using their whips to try to find the people who had run in. I heard some shooting, but I stayed totally still and didn't move. Again I heard my father's voice telling me to stay and not move. I don't know how long I stayed like that. After some time it was finally quiet. I opened my eyes. I saw two dead bodies and I was alive.

I was amazed because I realized, now that I could see something, that I had not even really been hiding. I was really just laying in a corner next to a grain scale, completely visible to anyone in the store. I guess the sun had prevented the Nazi from seeing where I was as it had prevented me from knowing that I was not hiding.

I left the store, not knowing how I would return to the factory. I had to return to the factory because there was nowhere else to go. If I stayed in the no-man's-land I would not be able to survive, as there was no food and no other people to help. I walked to the next burned out building and a man with a gun called out asking who I was and where I came from. I explained to him that I had been taken from the broom factory in a Selection and escaped by hiding in a store. Now I was looking for a way to get back to the broom factory.

He told me that he would show me the way if I would take his daughter, who was a girl my age, along with me to the broom factory and convince someone to allow her to work there. I agreed to try and he took me through burned out buildings and basements until we came underground to the broom factory.

When I returned, my roommates at the apartment were so glad to see me - they were certain I was gone forever. I took the young girl to my Meister and begged him to give her an identity card and a job in the factory and he finally did so.

Again it was quiet for a while. Then, one day, they announced that all the people in the broom factory were to meet on a certain street. I can't remember the name of the street. I don't know if this Selection was only for people in the broom factory, or included other factories, but there were thousands of people standing on the street. We brought some food with us and slept the night on the street. The next day there was a Selection. This was one of the biggest Selektions that I

know of. Some things happened during this Selection that broke my heart. I was standing in line and a very beautiful little girl came over to me, crying and asking to stay with me. I knew that if I allowed this child to stay with me I would be sent to the side that was going to the death camps. I began crying - I felt so terrible. I knew there was no way for this child to survive whether I took her or not. I understood that if she was standing next to me, they would take me along with her. I just told her to run to the end and look for her mother. I didn't feel there was any other choice.

Another incident that happened that same day was just as heartbreaking. A man was walking with a woman. He had a sack on his back. In the sack he was trying to hide a baby. Unfortunately, the baby moved and a Nazi saw this. He came up and put his bayonet through the bag, killing the baby. Then he sent the father with the dead baby to the side that was being sent to the death camps. This was almost unbearable to witness.

I want to know what happened to the human race? The Nazis were the hunters and murderers, seeking us as an animal would its prey. We became half-animals ourselves because our main concern was, somehow, to survive another day. We lost a part of our soul - there was no time to think about others or to be gentle. The main concern was how to survive - how not to be killed. Yet, there were acts of kindness among the Jews toward each other. The things we did during the war would be impossible to think about in normal circumstances.

I want to tell about another miracle that happened to me. Every one of us who survived have survived by miracles and some sort of good luck. I feel we had guardian angels. In my case, it was my father. I saw him very, very often at terrible moments in my life where, rationally, there was no possible way to survive. It sounds strange, but I heard my father's voice, telling me what to do at these most difficult moments.

As I said before, in the broom factory, there were many selections. I remember one day in the winter of 1942. There were five of us girls in the apartment and on this particular day, we were not working. Our apartment consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. There was running

water and even a bathroom. The kitchen had no window, so it was dark. The large room had a window and a door with a glass transom on top. The door was at an angle and led to the bedroom. There was a window in the bedroom that led to the back yard. All of us who lived in the apartment, plus 15 other people who lived in the building and were friends of ours, all young people in their teens, ran into our apartment. Nobody had any idea what to do, where to hide, and time was short until the Germans would be coming to our door to take us away.

These people came to our apartment because I told people prior to this, that I heard my father, somehow from the grave, telling me how to survive. I would close my eyes, I was crying - I prayed to God and to my father asking for guidance. At that moment I saw my father and heard his voice. He said "My child, hide in the bedroom."

I told everyone, and they agreed there was no other place to hide. So we spilled water on the floor of the kitchen and the large room hoping it might freeze and therefore, cause an obstacle to anyone wanting to enter. We unscrewed the bulb so it would be dark in the large room. Then we blocked the entrance to the bedroom with a small kitchen cabinet and piled the cabinet with two huge bundles of pillows to block the transom. There were shelves in the kitchen cabinet and in the back of one of the shelves we cut a hole so that we could go through to the bedroom to hide. We covered the window in the bedroom with a blanket so we wouldn't be visible to people outside, and we prayed.

We sat very quiet and heard people screaming, shots being fired. Finally, we heard them coming into our apartment. I remember them saying, "those filthy Jews, the house is so dirty." They were looking around and one of the Germans kicked the kitchen cabinet. God was with us and the bundles on top didn't fall down. After a short time, they left and we were all saved.

The building had three floors. On the first floor directly below us and the third floor, directly above us, the apartments had two rooms and a kitchen. Somehow, the Germans didn't seem to notice that our apartment only had one room and a kitchen. Perhaps they were distracted, I don't know what it was, but it certainly was a miracle.

Everyone sat in the room for the entire day. When we left the room the building was completely empty, we were the only survivors. I laid my head down, possibly I fell asleep, dreaming. Again, I heard my father's voice telling me not to stay in this place, but go to the factory. All of the people in the room tried to convince me not to go. They said I would be killed on the way there since we were not allowed on the street after dark and it was dark already. I wouldn't listen because, as I said many times before, my father told me not to stay in this place and I had to leave. I packed a small suitcase with my few belongings and walked to the factory. The streets were deserted, quiet - I saw no one.

I arrived at the factory and found one of the rooms open. I went in and found a chair. I sat down and fell asleep. When I awoke, people were beginning to come in to their jobs. I told them what had happened in our building, we were all crying for everyone who was taken away. The same day, I found out that the Germans came back to my apartment and found all 19 people who remained there.

I stayed at the factory for that day and when I knew that the Aktion was finished, I returned to my apartment. There I found another girl, someone who worked in the factory who moved in after all the people in our building were taken away. She didn't ask any questions and I didn't offer any explanations. She was a girl from a small Polish town who had moved to Warsaw before the war and was caught like the rest of us. I remember she was a pretty nice girl. We lived together until the uprising.

After this Aktion, it was very quiet for about two months, until the uprising. The Nazis led us to believe that they were treating us better. They even allowed us to bake matzos for the first time in the ghetto. Of course, all the time they were plotting our annihilation. They were preparing to liquidate the ghetto - removing everyone and sending them to the death camps. This is the legendary sadism of the Nazis. How can anyone call them human beings?

At this time, a small group of young people began organizing and discussing an uprising. We all swore that if we were caught we would give our lives, but never, never give another person's name to the

Nazis. Only a very few people knew where we would build the bunker and so, at the beginning I didn't know where it would be. We talked about getting food and medication for the bunkers. Some of our people were willing to smuggle themselves out of the ghetto to get ammunition from the Aryan side. We tried to get as much money as possible from wherever we could. This really was the birth of the uprising.

I was trained before the war in first aid, so my job, when the uprising came, would be to minister to the injured. There were 10 people in my group. Everyone knew just what his job was and didn't know much about the other people. That was the safest way to do things. We kept the existence of the group secret from all the other people as well.

The uprising began the first day of Passover, April 19, 1943. Passover, a time of celebration of our freedom from bondage and here we were more enslaved than we had ever been before, our people being decimated and tortured. This date was not a random choice for the Nazis. Hitler's birthday was the 20th of April and as a birthday present, his troops wanted to give him a Warsaw free of all Jews.

In order to understand how widespread this uprising was, I must explain that there were smaller ghettos within the large ghetto itself. Other areas of the ghetto were the Schultz factory, Tabens factory, and several others. I know that all the people remaining in the ghetto were either shot or sent to a death camp, but I do not know exactly how the people in other small ghettos were removed. I can only speak for what was going on in and around the broom factory.

I believe it was the evening of April 18, we heard by word of mouth that the ghetto had been surrounded by the SS, Latvian and Ukrainian troops as well as tanks. We were told to go down to the bunkers. Each person was assigned a specific bunker. My roommate wasn't part of the uprising movement and was not assigned to this bunker, but when I began going, she followed me. We had to let her in, there was no way we could leave her out. For one thing, we knew she would be exposed and killed or taken immediately and secondly, if she was captured, the Nazis might torture her and find out where we were hidden.

To get to the bunker, we had to go down to a first floor apartment. The windowsill was wider than a normal sill. We lifted the windowsill and inside there was a ladder going down to the basement, which we climbed down. When we reached the basement, there was another ladder, not visible from the top, that led to the bunker which was below the basement level. This bunker was constructed amazingly well. There was so much work and ingenuity in planning this, considering the incredibly limited resources we had.

The bunker had been planned for 30 people, but there were 35 in there now. We had some bunk beds, food, electricity that was connected to the city electricity, a well to provide us with water and a tunnel connected to the sewer system. Fresh air came in through the chimney above. We could have survived for a year in this manner.

When we became involved in the uprising, all of us made a pact that we would not allow the Nazis to take us. We knew that we have no chance to survive, but we wanted to die with dignity. We wanted history to record that it was not true that Jews went like sheep to the slaughter. We were prepared to fight to the last person.

The first day, the women sat in the bunker and the men were on the rooftops or balconies with homemade Molotov cocktails and the few guns we had, waiting for the Nazis. At first, a German tank tried to enter the broom factory and was promptly blown up by Molotov cocktails. This surprised the Nazis and they turned around and fled. Then we heard them on bullhorns asking us to come out of the bunkers. They promised they would resettle us to the small town of Trevniki where we could work and survive the war. The man speaking, Commander Stroop, the officer in charge of the liquidation, gave us his word of honor. Of course, our answer was "never again, will we allow you to take us, to kill us - we will fight to the end."

Every day the fighting began when the Nazis started bombing the ghetto with artillery pieces. The Nazis would never walk into the ghetto. They actually shot from outside of the ghetto with artillery and grenades, but they never actually came into the ghetto. The reason they didn't come inside the ghetto was because they were afraid for their lives.

At this point, I would like to mention the brave, young boys. They stood on the roofs and balconies of the buildings with Molotov cocktails and a few guns. They knew that there was a good possibility that they would be killed at any moment, but they fought so bravely against the mighty Nazi army. They would shoot any German who entered and they threw these Molotov cocktails over the wall to the German side as well. That's how we were able to kill the enemy.

During the uprising I found out that there were quite a few bunkers and that the famous bunker at Mila 18 was very close to ours. This bunker was the headquarters of the uprising and I later found out that the Commander and hero of the entire uprising was Mordecai Anielewicz, a young man whom I had known in his student days. Our bunker was located at Szewalska 30. In fact, we were in communication with them during the uprising.

Here's how we were able to communicate. The Germans were afraid to enter the ghetto during the nighttime hours. So at this time, some of the people from the bunker, mostly two men, would try to communicate and find out what was going on and how the situation was developing outside our bunker. Inside the bunker, we received instructions through the walkie-talkie system. For example, we would be warned to turn down the lights, to be quiet because the Nazis were close. I even remember one young man, with tears in his voice, told us to pray. A little later we got the news that this young man had been killed.

The atmosphere in the bunker was heavy with sadness. We were frightened, praying for a miracle and feeling so strongly that these were the last minutes of our lives. Every one of us tried to remember our parents, our dreams, our hopes and all that we had before the war. We were certain this would all be ended by one person with the power to destroy us. To think that one individual, who looked like a human being but was, in fact, such a terrible devil, could have this kind of power over the lives and deaths of so many people.

At that moment I questioned God. Where are you God? Why do You allow this to happen? Haven't we suffered enough already? Wasn't it

enough to lose all our loved ones? Wasn't it enough to see the hunger, the starvation, the beatings and killings and the streets full of the dead and dying? Do we now have to pay with the only thing we have - our lives? And why, why God? WHY?

Still, after everything I'd been through and seen, I still wanted so desperately to survive.

CHAPTER 7

We know that the majority of the Jewish people are decent people who tried, despite horrible suffering and deprivation, to survive as Jews and human beings. We know that, in the ghetto, so many risked their lives to aid others and that many, many fell as unnamed heroes. We know that many smuggled food and ammunition with the sure knowledge that this could lead to their deaths, but they so believed in the justice of our cause and were willing to pay with their lives.

With sorrow, we also have to acknowledge that there were some who betrayed us. I have no idea what would motivate a person to act in this manner, but I was a witness to one of these terrible betrayals.

One night a girl named Sapka, a guy named Mark and I went out to find out what had been happening that day. Mark had a gun with him for our protection. We had a different password each day so that we would know who was on our side and who wasn't. Because we knew that there were some people who betrayed us and were working for the Nazis, if we met someone and that person did not know the password, we were supposed to kill him or her.

We were walking through the passages in the building when we came upon a young boy - about 17 or 18 years old. He did not know the password and Mark wanted to kill him. Sapka and I began crying and begged him not to kill the boy. The boy told us that he was looking for his mother. He said that she was possibly hiding in one of the bunkers or one of the buildings, but he didn't know where. He knew that he was risking his life to do this, but he had to find his mother.

After convincing Mark that we shouldn't kill the boy, we took this boy into our bunker to keep him with us. He stayed with us for a few days and told us a story about his mother being the only one who survived. He was sure she was somewhere in this area. After listening to him for two days, we allowed him to leave the bunker and continue his search for her.

He left the bunker at night and the following day we heard the Nazis on top of us. They tried to open the windowsill and get into the

bunker. Some of our people went from the bunker through a tunnel to the sewers, but there really wasn't time for everyone to escape. Actually, there wasn't really time to think before they began coming for us. We were waiting for them to come in and take us.

First the Nazis sent the young boy in. A guy who was standing close to the entrance bit the boy's nose when he came down because he understood that this boy had betrayed the entire bunker. Had there been time, he would have killed the boy.

There was hysterical crying. We didn't know if we would be killed in the bunker or they would kill us outside of the bunker. They threw tear gas into the bunker. They were screaming at us to get out of the bunker. My eyes were watering, I was sick - we all thought this was the end. I remember saying the Shema to myself.

The next thing I remember was being in another courtyard in a bunker located in the next building. I don't know how I got from the other courtyard to this one. I know that I had no shoes and I don't remember where or how I lost them, but the next thing I do remember was standing in the rubble of a burned out building and trying to hide there. I noticed there were several people hiding close by as well. When I think about it now, it seems like rats trying to hide in a cellar. Certainly, this was how we felt.

We found a little food that we shared between all of us there. We had no idea what the next moment would bring. We came upon another bunker and went in. This bunker wasn't as well prepared as ours. There were about 40 people with very little food and very little space. Because I was not a part of the bunker to begin with, there was especially not much for me. About 7 or 8 people escaped from our original bunker. All the others were captured. Sapka was among those who escaped and I saw her in this bunker as well.

The people in this bunker gave us very bad news. There was very little ammunition left and we had no more fuel for Molotov cocktails. This was the beginning of May, so the uprising had been going on already for almost two weeks.

The Nazis acknowledged that they lost many soldiers, certainly more than we were losing. Of course, we knew that they had far more resources at their disposal - an entire army if necessary, so we knew it was only a matter of time until they would overtake us. However, we continued to resist until the end.

After two weeks, the Nazis realized that they would not be able to get us out of the bunkers so they began burning each and every building in the ghetto. The fire was tremendous, it seemed like the whole world was in flames. Because we got our fresh air from the outside, we knew that we could not survive even though we were in the bunker. We knew the building would eventually collapse on us and that the supply of fresh air which came through the chimney, would be overcome by the flames and smoke.

The young man in charge of our bunker told us what to do when the fires began. We were supposed to wait until the building burned to the first floor. We were to wet ourselves, our clothing, our hair and hold a wet piece of cloth to our mouths to help keep the smoke from choking us.

Around May 2nd or 3rd, I'm not certain of the day at this time, but I think it was a few days before I was captured, they began burning all the buildings in the entire broom factory. We waited until the fire reached the first floor, wetted ourselves and, holding cloths to our mouths, all came out of the bunker.

Some people decided, rather than be captured by the Nazis, they would commit suicide and they took a pill rather than leave the bunker. I remember a couple of people were able to escape through the sewers. Later I found out that the Nazis had thrown a bomb in the sewer system and killed anyone down there.

What we saw was an inferno consuming the building. This was a very large apartment building and we were in the courtyard of the building. Much of the building was already destroyed.

How can I describe this terrible tragedy - this terrible, unbelievable scene. We knew that we were unable to do anything about this,

knowing there is no place to hide, knowing that you have to come out of the bunker or you will be suffocated or burned alive, knowing that nobody was listening to or cared about our cries? We held our cloths to our mouths and tried to hide as best we could. We prayed, we cried, we knew that we needed a miracle to survive.

I saw huge pieces of burning wood falling from the building. One woman had a very young baby, a few months old at most. She was holding him in a small bundle that was the way babies were carried in Europe at this time. There was a pillow and a board of some kind. The baby was laid on the board and covered with a cloth on top that was tied for the baby's protection. As she held the baby, a large fiery piece of wood came flying down off the building and fell into the bundle where the baby was laying. Everyone began screaming and the woman was forced to abandon the bundle. I remember she was half crazy, screaming and crying, knowing that there was nothing she could do to save the baby. It was one of the most horrible things I had to witness. There we were, with no help from people or from God.

May 5 the Nazis found us all. Several of us were trying to hide in a burned out building. I walked out with the rest of the people. It was a sunny day, the fire was burning around us, the smoke was unbelievable, the screaming, the praying still rings in my ears. But I know that even as we were leaving, the resistance fighting continued.

The Nazis gathered us together, took all the men, supposedly to clean the bunkers. About 10 of us, young girls were marched to a wall that was part of the burned out building. They told us to face the wall and reach our hands up. I was certain they were going to kill us. I said the Shma and prepared to die. I heard some shooting, but after a few minutes they told us to turn around. They hadn't killed any of us, they were just laughing, showing us that they could have killed us if they had wanted to. For them this was a little amusement.

Were they really human, or were they just vicious animals on two legs?

All of us girls were shocked. I didn't know if I should be thankful to be alive or really worried what they would do the next minute. They then brought some men and took all of us to Umschlagplatz. On the way, of

course, they were whipping everyone, killing a few of the people. They didn't immediately put us in the cattle cars, but kept us in the basement of Umschlagplatz.

I must explain that the building at Umschlagplatz, before the war, was a school. Since I wasn't from this neighborhood, I don't know if the train tracks were there before the war or were put in by the Nazis. I know that at this time, the cattle cars came right up to the Umschlagplatz.

The following morning, May 6, they lined us up to enter the cattle cars. They were counting people and I was first in the line. As I was standing there, the Nazi SS man who was counting, came up and pressed his cigarette into my forehead to put it out and laughed sadistically. Thinking that I was on my way to my death, I felt nothing, I don't even remember the pain, I remember the incident. This was 59 years ago and I still have a scar from this.

But I did have one bit of satisfaction from this ugly SS man. He spotted the young boy who had betrayed our bunker. This traitor was on his way to the train along with everyone else. The SS man pulled the traitor out of line and I heard him say, "You are sh*t for the Jews and you are the same to us." And with that, he killed him on the spot.

Then they stuffed us all in the cattle cars. This was a train of cattle cars, maybe 10 or 15 cars long. There were so many people in each car that there was no way to sit or even stand straight. We were all squeezed together. The opening for animals to give them air, was 3/4 closed so there was almost no air coming in. There was no food, no water, no hygiene at all.

I was very lucky, I stood close to the door. The door was made of wood and some of the knots in the wood had fallen out. I was very close to a small opening. I put my nose to the opening and was able to breathe a little. It was almost impossible to describe the situation in the cattle car. To this day, when I hear the sound of the trains rolling along the rails, with that chugging and thudding sound I am taken back to that awful time. The noise turned into words - "We're coming, the end is near, there is no tomorrow, there is no future." The people

locked inside the cattle car were screaming and crying, praying and cursing. They were begging for a little water. For us, there was just darkness even though the sun was shining brightly outside the train. We heard some Poles lined up close to the train and as we passed we heard them yelling at us, "Throw us the diamonds and gold, you're going to die anyway." At that moment I didn't believe that God would look at this terrible horror and allow it happen.

I have no idea how long we were there, but I know how far it is from Warsaw to Maidanek - approximately 300 miles. That would mean we were traveling about 2 days. Treblinka camp was about 70 miles from Warsaw, much closer than Maidanek, but the Nazis didn't dare send us there because there had been an uprising in that camp and much of the camp had been destroyed by the Jews. About 800 Jews escaped to the forest with this uprising. Only a handful of them actually survived the war. Both Maidanek and Treblinka were death camps.

When we got close to Lublin, close to Maidanek, they opened the cattle cars. At least 1/3 of the people were dead and I, who am small and fragile, somehow survived. Again, they were waiting for us with dogs and whips. They marched us, yelling and screaming "Raus", "Mach schnell - farfluchte Juden" - Get out, quickly, miserable Jews. From this station we walked to Maidanek. I can't recall how far it was

We arrived and saw the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" - Work Will Make You Free. They separated the men from the women. The women were taken to a huge exhibition hall. They told us to undress and put our clothes neatly in a pile so we would be able to find them after we took a shower. We were told to stand in a line completely naked. There were two doors and a very small Nazi standing between the doors with a whip. I will never forget his ugly face. He gestured with his whip which door each girl should go through. We thought both doors contained real showers. I went through the door he pointed to and took a shower. When I returned to the hall I realized that many of the people we had been standing in line with were missing. It was then that we realized that they had been sent to the gas chamber. The second door led not to the showers, but to the gas chamber.

They didn't give us our clothes back, everyone got different clothes. There were no uniforms, we just got some pieces of clothing - no matter if they fit or not. I got a very large shirt, a skirt and a checkered sweater with a pair of wooden clogs for my feet. This was certainly someone else's clothing. They gave us no underwear. I was able to fashion a bra and pair of underpants from part of the shirt because it was so large. I just ripped part of it off. This was more than many others had. In the pocket of the sweater, I found a very small red pencil. I believe that this pencil was later to save my life on several occasions. I will explain this later. Then they walked us to our barracks in Camp Number 5.

I'd like to describe Maidanek a bit. Before the war, Maidanek was a Polish Army Camp. It was a huge camp. When the Germans took over, they added a crematorium and a gas chamber that worked 24 hours a day. The entire camp was surrounded by electrified barbed wire. The camp was divided into 5 camps. Camp 1 and 2 were for gentiles - possibly political prisoners, smugglers, homosexuals, gypsies and some wonderful Christians who had tried to help Jews. The third camp was for Jewish men from all over Europe. The fourth camp was mostly for Jewish men from the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto. The fifth camp was for Jewish women from everywhere in Europe but mainly from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Between the 4th and 5th camps was a small camp for women. In this camp they held the women who were to be taken soon to the gas chamber. I remember young, beautiful girls from Salonika, Greece who came and were put in this camp. I knew they were going to be killed. We couldn't talk to them because they didn't speak any Yiddish. The following day they were all gone - killed in the gas chamber.

How can I describe the life in Maidanek? The only way is to say, if there is a Hell, it couldn't be as bad as Maidanek. Every morning before sunrise an SS man or woman would come into our barracks, screaming "Alle raus" - "everyone out" and we had to be out of the barracks and in formation in 5 minutes. This is the time that we were counted. We did this again in the evening. We had very little clothes and it was quite cold. Everyone who could stand did so and the ones who couldn't were taken out on blankets. Every day there was a selection and the people

on the blankets were taken first. Then the SS would walk around and take other people as well.

One day I got very ill with dysentery and couldn't stand or walk. When the time came for roll call, I was taken out on a blanket. At this point, I didn't care any more - I prayed to die because I didn't see any possible way to survive. But somebody had to be watching over me because on this morning, for some reason, the man who did the selection didn't show up and I was returned to the barracks. This went on for 2 days. After that I was feeling better and when the SS man who did the selection returned I was able to stand once again.

There was a girl in our barracks that I got friendly with called Paula. It was very important to have someone to be able to talk to, to cry on their shoulder. It was impossible to survive by yourself, everyone needed someone to be close to.

Paula was everything for me - my mother, my sister, my friend. She was the angel who helped me to survive. She was the one who fought for a little black coffee and soup to help me when I was ill. She also made sure that I didn't leave the barracks in the middle of the night. There were searchlights and if anyone came out of the barracks they would be killed instantly.

I mentioned a little red pencil that I found in my sweater pocket. With this pencil, I would put some color into my cheeks and lips every day so I would appear to be healthier than I actually was. I shared this pencil with Paula, but nobody else knew about it. I am convinced that this little pencil saved my life many times.

This was a death camp, so there was no industry here. For our part, our work consisted of carrying something like a small piece of soil with grass from one place to another. If the soil fell apart, you were killed. Sometimes we carried a stone from one place to another.

There were a lot of SS women. They were the worst sadists that could exist. I remember one especially. Her name was Brigitta. She was beautiful with blonde hair. She rode on a beautiful white horse. There wasn't a day that went by that she didn't kill someone. She beat people

to death with her whip. Another one, we called her Kobilla which means horse in Polish. She was kicking people until the person fell down and died. But there was also one who we called Mawa Perelca "Little Pearl". She was small and completely different than the rest of them. When you were lucky enough to be taken out by Little Pearl, she would tell us to huddle together to stay warm. She didn't want us to do anything. She placed four girls in the corners of the field to watch for other SS who might happen by. If other SS came she began using her whip and yelling, but she really tried to look out for us and keep us as safe and warm as possible. She was an amazing person. She told us that she was there because back in Germany they told her either she would work in Maidanek or they would send her son to the Russian front. So her heart was with us and she did her best for us.

Even more ridiculous and useless, sometimes they marched us to a place where there were three wires set up. Two of the wires were seven or eight feet high and were parallel to each other. The third wire began at the top of one wire to the bottom of the other wire. Between those wires there was grass. We could not stand up in this space, nor could we kneel or sit or lay. But we were supposed to pretend we were pulling weeds from this area. Sometimes we had to bend in this manner for 5 or 6 hours at a time.

In the whole camp, there were no toilets. There were kettles with pieces of wood around them. They were all in the open space, no bathrooms. If someone had to go to relieve herself during the night, the guard would surely kill her. There was a "Sheiscommander", people who carried the kettles and disposed the waste outside the camp. I had this job at one point and when I approached the SS guard Kobilla, who I described before. Everyone who came to the gate had to report where we were going or what we were doing. There were 20 of us with kettles and I said that there were 20 women who would be disposing of the waste. She yelled at me that we weren't "women", but garbage, shit, and she began to kick and hit me. When we passed the gate with the kettles I wasn't sure I could keep myself from fainting after the beating, but the other women said to me "keep going, you can do it, don't fall", I was very lucky that somehow I was able to remain standing. Amazingly, I, along with the other 19 women, came back alive.

I remember one girl who tried to escape. She was caught and brought back. They made her stand on a stool while they were putting the rope around her neck. . They forced the whole camp to come and watch while they began preparations to hang her.

One SS man said to all of us who were gathered around, "Now you will see what will happen to any one of you who will try to escape. And if one of you tries to escape, we won't just hang the one, but 10 more." I remember her last words, "Girls, hang on, someone *has* to survive to tell the story. Don't ever forget me, tell the world what you saw here" and she began to sing Hatikvah (the Jewish national anthem). Just then one of the SS men kicked the stool out from under her and she was hanged. After they hanged her, they made us stand and look at her body for a long time. When we awoke the next morning and came for the roll call, the body was gone.

We could sometimes stand there for hours, shivering, fearful. The sun was shining, but not for us.

I really don't remember how we washed ourselves in Maidanek or even *if* we washed at all. I know that I was in Maidanek approximately 5 months and I only remember one time when a group of us were taken to the showers by an SS woman.

Going to the showers was a very risky business. We didn't know if they would actually take us to real showers or to the gas chamber which was, of course set up to look like a shower room.

But I knew that if I didn't wash or get clean in some way, I would get skin lesions or some skin disease. And with a skin disease I would certainly be selected for the gas chamber, so I had to take this chance.

We were given a piece of soap - it was a greenish color and very different from any soap I'd ever seen before. It wouldn't lather well and it had a grainy texture. I didn't know it at the time, but this was soap that had been created from human remains.

Can you imagine our shock, after the war, when we found out that all the soap from the death camps had been made from the bodies of human beings? As much trauma and horror as we had experienced, still did not prepare us for this incredible outrage.

We gathered all the soap we could find and buried it in the cemetery the same as we would bury a person. The emotion was tremendous, we were crying uncontrollably, realizing that any of this soap could be made from parts of our loved ones. We said a prayer, hoping to give them as much dignity and honor as we could. Thinking about this distresses me to this day.

On the way to the showers we had to pass a small building which housed the kitchen. I will never forget that day. There, next to the building was a huge hill of bones. They did not look anything like animal bones; to me, they looked like human bones. I can't be sure what they really were, I never went that way again, but these bones gave me a creepy feeling that has remained with me whenever I think of them. In fact, as I write this, and every time I think about them, I get cramps in my stomach. The thought that human bones might be used in cooking was so horrible to me that I have only mentioned it to a very few people through the years.

Our group was taken to the showers to wash; nobody was taken out and sent to the gas chamber at this time. Luckily, we all returned to the barracks safely. I felt a bit better and bit cleaner. Unfortunately, we had to dress in our old clothes that weren't very clean, having been worn for weeks at a time, but at least our bodies didn't smell.

We could hardly call what we ate food, but a small ration that barely kept us alive. We received this ration in the morning after we were counted in the roll call. We got a black liquid that was supposed to be coffee. It's greatest attribute was that it was warm. We also got a chunk of black bread. It tasted terrible. Before the second roll call, we received a watery soup and sometimes we found some very small pieces of meat floating around in it. I never touched any of the meat because I was never sure where this meat had come from. I think we received another chunk of bread at this time as well but I can't recall exactly. This was the sum total of our nutrition for the day.

The conditions in the barracks were terrible. We slept on wooden bunks. There were no mattresses and each bunk had a lower and upper section. Approximately 15 people slept in each section of the bunk. We had almost nothing to cover us - just some very small blankets, but not enough for everyone. It was so crowded in the bunk, that if one person wanted to turn, all 15 had to turn with her. Every night, people died. We would find them in the morning and they were taken away.

Every day was a struggle to stay alive every minute. We were humiliated and tortured mentally and physically. My prayer at that time, was that I would be lucky enough to go to sleep at night and *not* to wake up the next morning. At that time I was a girl of 17 years. At that time I began to give up. I couldn't see a way out of Maidanek except through death.

One night we were told to sleep in our clothes. I couldn't figure out why we were told this, as we had no other clothes to sleep in than the ones on our backs. They told us to be completely ready - for what, we had no idea. Nothing happened that night. The next morning I talked to a Polish kapo. A kapo is like a foreman. These women were not Jewish, but Polish or German. They had the power to beat or even kill us - they were very cruel people. I asked this particular kapo, who wasn't as bad as some of the others, what was going on. She told me that everyone in our camp was scheduled to be killed that evening, but something had happened to stop them from doing this. The kapo had no idea why.

The next day, a very sunny morning, we heard an announcement on the loudspeaker calling all women ages 15 through 30 to come to a specific barracks. This was a huge place. Inside there were narrow tables set up on both sides of the room. Behind the tables were people they called "doctors" dressed in white coats. We were to undress completely and parade before the "doctors" and the "doctor" at the end would either ask for a woman's number or say nothing. Paula was not sure that having your number taken was a good thing. She thought we might be killed. I told Paula that I prefer to get killed by a bullet, not knowing exactly when, than to wait to get taken to the gas

chamber - something we knew was inevitable. Nobody really had any idea what these numbers were being taken for, but I realized immediately that the ladies whose numbers were taken looked healthier than the others. I undressed and walked before them and at the end they took my number. Paula had some skin problems and when she passed before these men, her number was not taken. We were in a panic and I was horrified that I would be by myself again. We didn't know if having our number taken would actually be good or bad, but we wanted to be together. I went back, undressed a second time and paraded before the men on the other side of the room, although I'm sure the men on the first side would never remember me from before since there were so many women parading by. At the end I was asked for my number and I gave Paula's number, knowing that whatever fate awaited us, at least we'd be together.

They never told us anything, and the horrible life we endured went on for another two or three weeks. Then again we heard on the loudspeaker that all the ladies whose numbers had been taken should come to this same large barracks. There were hundreds of women. We were made to undress and parade again before men in white coats. This time there was only one large table at the end. At it were books that had recorded the number of each woman. Near the table were two SS men with whips. They looked at each woman, asked for her number and sent her to the left or right. We knew this was some kind of selection, but we had no idea what they would do with us. To my great sorrow, Paula and I were separated. I never saw her again.

After this selection, we were put in cattle cars. The cars were not as crowded as when I came to Maidanek. The open space on the top was open instead of closed. We had a place to sit and they gave us $\frac{1}{2}$ a bread with butter and some black coffee. To this day, I can't remember anything tasting as good as this bread and coffee did that day. I looked around and I said to the other girls, - "we're not going to be killed, we're being sent somewhere. "

I don't remember how long we were in the cattle cars. We ended up in a concentration camp called Skarzysko-Kamienne.

Chapter 8

Skarzysko-Kamienne was hidden deep in the Polish woods. Skarzysko-Kamienne had three camps, A, B, and C. In Camp C they were working with yellow powder for the ammunition. All the people turned yellow and got very ill. Of course, anyone who was ill was taken out and killed in the forest. So the life expectancy in this camp was very short.

The camps were located in different areas, but not far from each other. I was in Camp B, which, in comparison to Camp C was much better. In Camp B, I was working in an ammunition factory also, but not with that yellow powder. We worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. Every three weeks, we were given a Sunday off. There was a little more food here than in Maidanek. There still wasn't enough food to keep us from feeling hunger, but it was enough so that we wouldn't starve. Our food consisted of black liquid, ersatz coffee, with a piece of bread in the morning. In the evening we got soup, a little thicker than the one in Maidanek and another piece of bread - much better bread than in Maidanek. Once every two weeks we got a small piece of butter and a little bit of jelly. We also got a small piece of soap. This was regular soap, not the kind they had in Maidanek.

Camp B wasn't a big camp; it was smaller than A and C. There were some barracks and we slept only two people to one bunk. There wasn't a mattress, but there was something to soften the wood - possibly there was straw, I don't remember exactly what they used. We also got blankets - not too many, and there was a small barrack with showers and wash tubs. Next to the wash tubs were 3 individual toilets on the outside. In comparison to Maidanek this was very much better. Of course, we are comparing concentration camps, so even the best of them were horrible.

In Camp B, there were no crematoriums or gas chambers, but, every couple of weeks they took people too ill to work out to the forest and killed them. Most of these people were men because they did the most difficult work. Many of them worked on very large machinery and because of the oil from the machinery they got sick. These were the majority of people who were taken out and killed.

Surrounding the camp was electrified barbed wire as in all the camps. We had roll calls every day but didn't stand for hours unless something unusual happened.

In Skarzysko there were Jewish policemen. One in particular was very nice. None of them walked around with whips and most of them were much nicer than the ones in Maidanek. In Maidanek the police were kapos, they were Polish or German and they were very cruel and sadistic as I described before. These policemen in Skarzysko-Kamienne were much better and much more human. They were responsible for taking us to and from the factory and counting us. There was no way they could "miscount" or allow anyone to escape, as the Nazis knew at all times how many people were being transferred to and from the factory. The factory was outside the camp and deep in the woods.

In the town of Skarzysko-Kamienne there were some wealthy Jewish families. When they were called to the camp, they paid some poor Jewish people, maids and manual laborers, to take their place in the camp. Ironically, the people who took these wealthy families' places survived, at least for a time, while the wealthy families were taken out into the forest and killed en masse.

In Skarzysko I was lucky enough to meet three wonderful girls who became very close to me. We actually became like sisters in this camp. We shared everything. One was Marisia Malatcka a girl from Warsaw whose family knew my family. This girl was about 19 or 20. She had graduated gymnasium (high school) in Warsaw. She was extremely bright and talented; she was like a walking encyclopedia. The other two girls were the daughters of a Polish Jewish senator - I believe their name was Trutsker. I don't recall the first names of these girls.

We all stayed together and tried to help each other any way we could. We found out that if we were to work on our day off, we could get some extra food rations or a little bit of money. We didn't have any clothes except those that we brought on our backs when we came from Maidanek. Skarzysko was promised some clothing from Maidanek and

when it didn't arrive some of the officials began inquiring as to what was happening. A few of them went to Maidanek about 3 or 4 weeks after we arrived and found out that the reason we didn't receive any clothing was that this camp had been liquidated. What I mean by this is that all the prisoners were killed. The Nazis killed the people with machine guns. We heard that the music was playing in the camp for three days and three nights while the Nazi soldiers killed all the people. So there was no clothing for anyone.

The people who had come to camp taking the place of the wealthy families had some money and didn't want to do menial labor aside from their normal jobs in the ammunition factory. So they paid people to do this extra work for them. Marisia was doing laundry, the two sisters went to work cleaning toilets, and I went to work mending men's t-shirts. We got a little bit of extra food for this.

In Camp B there were some Polish women working with us. They came from the town. Sometimes, someone would bring us a piece of bread that helped very much against our hunger. They realized how hungry the Jews were and, even though it was forbidden to bring in food, they did so anyway, knowing how much it would help us. So you can see that, as well as the terrible people who turned their backs on us, there were some who helped and even risked their lives for us.

I was luckier than most, because one of the ladies who came to work brought me a piece of bread every other day. This helped me so much.

I knew that we had nothing to wear and we needed some change of clothing to keep ourselves clean, so I decided to take a huge risk and steal some t-shirts. I took 8 t-shirts, each one individually, two for each of us. I was lucky enough not to be caught because I was sure death waited for me if I was discovered.

The t-shirts were white and they were only worn by the men. So we would not be able to wear them without being discovered unless we could alter them in some way. If the Germans saw us in these shirts, knowing that I worked mending them, we would all be caught and killed.

I asked a Polish lady who worked with me to bring some dye and she was nice enough to bring it to us. We, of course, paid her to get this for us. In the camp we were lucky enough to have hot water and we dyed all the t-shirts, I believe they were dark blue, but some darker color for certain. The Jewish girls from the town gave us some underwear that we hadn't had in a very long time. In this way, after so many months, each of us had something resembling real clothing and underwear. We didn't really have any reasonable shoes - most of our shoes were torn, so we used paper to help insulate our feet and keep ourselves warm.

We were very cold in the camp. We had a stove, but no coal or wood to burn in it. We used paper to cover ourselves. It wasn't warm, but it did help a bit. We knew that we could buy something from the Jewish policemen, but we didn't have any money. Meanwhile, in the barracks, two girls had frozen to death from the cold. The four of us knew we had to get some money for fuel so we could keep warm.

We decided to put on a show and charge everyone a little money. This way we would be able to purchase some wood and keep warm. The show, which described the camp life in a comical way, was a rousing success and even the Jewish policemen came and enjoyed themselves. I even saw a few of the Polish-German soldiers watching as well. We made enough money to buy wood. We all took turns tending the fire and made sure that nobody else froze to death.

In the small amount of free time that we had, the four of us were able to get back some human emotion. We laughed and cried and talked about the future. Without this, I don't think any of us could have survived the war.

In this camp we were given small pieces of soap. The soap was kept in a cabinet. I believe the cabinet was unlocked. One night I saw one of the girls go into the cabinet and take a piece of soap. In the morning, the Nazi in charge discovered that there was a piece of soap missing and lined us all up outside. He asked the person who took the soap to come forward, but nobody did. He told us we would stand all day and all night. We stood a very long time and then he decided to count off every 10th person. These people were taken out and given 10 lashes

with a whip. Unfortunately, I was one of these and I remember when they were finished, I couldn't sit for days. But still, I was glad that nobody was killed. Even though I knew who had taken the soap, I never revealed it to anyone.

I want to describe a very close call I had. In fact, I was certain my time had run out. I was working in the ammunition factory with bullet casings. I worked a 12-hour shift and another girl, Margulies, worked the other 12 hours. Working down the line from me was a very beautiful girl who had come to the camp from Krakow. She actually had a German officer as a lover. One day they were checking the finished ammunition and found that 10,000 bullets were defective. They traced the defect to my controller and took Margulies and I back to the barracks. They told us that we had sabotaged the bullets. We both cried and proclaimed our innocence, but they told us we would not be allowed to go back to work and we should just wait in the barracks until they came to take us away. We knew that when they took us, we would be killed.

We were left alone in the barracks for about a week. We were both crying our eyes out, as were my 3 friends. We cried and prayed and one day I asked one of the Jewish policemen to take me back to the factory. He argued with me and said he couldn't but finally gave in. I went back to the factory, to the place I used to work at and someone else was working there. I just stood there and cried and cried. A German officer, not an SS, but an SD, came along. He asked why I was crying, and told me he had a daughter my age. He was very concerned about her as they were bombing his hometown. He took me into his office and questioned me, asking if either Margulies or I had committed the sabotage. I proclaimed my innocence again and again and I swore to him that I hadn't done anything wrong. He told me not to worry, that he would investigate the situation and try to find what had happened and that if I was telling the truth, he would make sure I was saved.

It was very quiet for a while. I still wasn't working. I constantly prayed for a miracle. Then, one day the miracle happened. I found out that this beautiful girl from Krakow along with some men, was killed in the forest. It turned out she wasn't sabotaging the bullets, but was not

doing her job. She thought that because she had a German lover, she didn't have to do anything and because of this, the finished bullet came out badly on my controller.

Right then I think I began to believe in God again. This was really a miracle. I could barely believe that this had happened. Afterwards, Margulies and I went back to work. I'm sorry to say that after two months or so Margulies, because she was ill, was taken out and killed. This was a very close call for me.

One other incident that I remember very vividly. The Russian Army was coming closer and we were all gathered together to prepare to leave the camp. We were all counted and told that we were going to another camp. The sick ones were again taken to the forest and killed. One of the SS officers had a mistress among the Jewish girls. She was also from Crackow and was very beautiful. The girl had been involved in an accident and one of her hands was not functioning properly. He came up to her and told her that he couldn't send her to the new camp because of her hand. He said he was supposed to send her to the forest to be killed, but, if she begged him for her life, he would allow her to live. She refused to beg and he killed her with a gunshot to the head. And we all had to stay there and watch this.

We gathered all our small belongings and the following day we were put in open cattle cars where you could breathe better. We were given some food - bread and water I believe. We traveled for approximately one day and one night. Luckily, the weather was good and the sun was shining, so we weren't cold. When we left, once again, as before, the Poles from the villages were standing on the side yelling at us, "Throw us whatever you have because they're going to kill you anyway." But they didn't kill us.

They sent us to another camp that also manufactured ammunition. This camp was called Chestochowa.

CHAPTER 9

When we arrived in Chestochowa, we were kept outside of the camp in a holding area surrounded by barbed wire, but we could see the camp itself. I was really very surprised to see people who looked so different from people I had seen in the Warsaw Ghetto, Majdanek and even Skarszysko-Kamienne. These people were looked healthier, were dressed in clothes which I hadn't seen for a good few years. I saw them walking. They surely didn't look like the musselmen I had seen in the other camps.

Musselmen were people who looked like skeletons, they had yellow skin. They were dying physically and mentally - these people had no emotions and had given up all hope. These were the walking dead.

Before we were allowed into the camp, one of the main Kapos came out of the camp and offered to make me a Kapo. I absolutely refused. I said that I could do anything, but would never, never be a Kapo. For me a Kapo was someone who did irreparable harm to his fellow Jew for his own benefit and survival. I would rather die than do this.

Finally, in the evening they let all of the people in and we were lined up for roll call. An SD officer began calling out different professions such as shoemaker, tailor, electrician, plumber, dressmaker. All the people who answered to the professions were taken out of line and sent away. Here there were no whips, the people were just taken away.

Later I learned that around the city of Chestechowa there were three camps; Warta, Chestochowianka, and Peltsary. I was to find out later that Peltsary was the best camp in the area.

After a few hours, all the people were gone, including my three friends - Marisia Malatchka and the two sisters who were the daughters of Senator Trutzker. So there were three of us left; me and two other girls I was not acquainted with. The SD officer asked me what I did and I answered that I was a schoolgirl. He said they had no need of schoolgirls here and I would be sent somewhere else.

Seeing the condition of this camp and how different it was from all the other places; and knowing that I would be able to survive in this camp, I became frightened that they would send me away to be killed. I began to cry hysterically because I had been through so much and I knew I could survive here. I was very frightened of what awaited me outside of this camp. I asked God, "Why, why, do I have to die now that I've come to this place where I know it's possible to survive."

As I was standing and crying, a man walked up to me and began a conversation. He asked why I was crying as well as about myself, where I was from, where I had been, and we spoke for a while. He introduced himself as Arnold Steiner from Chestochowa and told me he was certain they would not take me away from the camp that night; that I would be able to sleep in the barracks. He told me to come the next morning to the same place we had met and he would try to see if he could do something to help me.

That night, I was so relieved to see my three friends in the barracks. They laughed at me and asked me why I didn't create a profession for myself. When I told them I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do what was required of the profession I chose; they told me that I still hadn't grown up. Now I came to understand that the Germans didn't need any dressmakers or shoemakers, they actually needed people to work in the ammunition factory. So all the people were taken to the factory to work, not given work in their professions. They thought I, as a schoolgirl, would not be able to do the work in the factory.

The following morning, I returned to the place where I had met Arnold. He showed up, along with another man. Arnold told me that the other man was a kapo. I was very frightened, because in my mind, a kapo was a terrible person, a traitor to his own people and someone to fear. But Arnold told me that here, things are a bit different. The kapos were not as terrible as in other camps. This particular man was a very nice person and, in fact, had been a neighbor of Arnold's in Chestochowa.

Arnold told me that I would not be sent away, but would belong to one of the groups of people working in the ammunition factory. He told

me I had to come every day to the roll call, but then I would go back to barracks and not work at all.

I could not understand what he was talking about. How would it be possible to be in the camp and not work? He told me not to worry, that I wasn't the only one. He said I must trust him. I was very frightened, but I had to do what he said. I asked him if he was paying for this arrangement, because I was adamant that I would not allow a man to pay for my safety. I realized that if he was paying for me, I would have to return the favor in some way, and I didn't want to get involved in this type of relationship at all.

Arnold answered that he didn't pay anything; that the kapo did it for him as a gesture of their friendship.

I asked Arnold why he did this for me. He said he had a sister that he loved very much who was killed and that I reminded him of her.

So every day I went to the roll call and when it was finished, instead of going to the factory, I went back to the barracks. The only problem was that people received food at their work place, and I had no work place. Every day, Arnold brought me some food. In this camp there was some black market activity. I found that Arnold and his brother, who was also in the camp, were involved in this. They had smuggled some money into the camp and were doing some business with the Poles who came to work at the camp. Also, some of the underground people smuggled money into the camp and Arnold knew some of these people.

Arnold told me that he would bring me food every day. I was grateful, but told him about my three friends who never got enough food. Arnold brought food for me and a small amount of extra food for my friends.. At this point I was again concerned about how I would pay him for all of this food. When I told him that I had no money and would not accept food without paying, Arnold told me that he would write down everything that I owed him and if, at the end of the war, we both survived, I would pay him back. If not, it would make no difference anyway. He also told me that I wasn't the only one who owed him money.

Every day when he brought the food, I checked to make sure he wrote down how much I owed him. This went on for a few months. Arnold and I developed a friendship, but he still addressed me as Miss Basia. Finally, I got tired of this, and I began to call him by his first name only and asked him to do the same with me.

After a few months, I came to the roll call and noticed that the Nazi officer in charge saw me returning to the barracks. I then saw the officer speaking with a kapo and the officer pointed his finger at me. This frightened me very much. When Arnold brought the food, I told him what happened and he tried to calm me immediately. He said that this kapo was his best friend in Chestochowa and wouldn't do anything to me.

Unfortunately, he was very wrong. The following day, when I came to roll call, the same officer and kapo were waiting for me. When everyone went to work, I was called over. The Nazi officer spoke to me in German and I answered in Polish, telling him that I didn't understand. He brought a girl to translate, but I think he knew that I understood German. He asked me where I worked and, of course, I told him about a place where they were checking the bullets, not knowing that they had closed up this section two years ago. He also asked me why I didn't go to work the day before.

This is the first time I began finally using my head. I know this was incredible chutzpah, but I told him that I had a terrible headache and felt sick. I said that I asked the kapo if I could go back to barracks. The kapo began screaming that I never had asked him anything and that, in any case, he would not have allowed me to go back to the barracks.

Then I started to cry - I knew what they would do to me. They would take me to be beaten and I was afraid that I might, under such terrible pain, tell about the others who didn't work also. This frightened me more than the prospect of the beating. I thought I would die, but I didn't want to hurt the three other people.

Up to this time, I survived through miracles, and now, another miracle happened. The same Nazi officer sent everyone, including the translator and the kapo back to work. He told me to come with him. He spoke German and I stopped pretending that I didn't know German and followed him. I had no idea where I was being taken and I was shivering with fear. As we walked, we saw the Commander of the camp coming in our direction. The officer I was with told me to stand still and not to say a word. He saluted the Commander and they exchanged a few words, but nothing about me. When the Commander went by, we began walking again in silence.

It was then that I realized that, perhaps he wasn't going to kill me. We walked into a place where all the Nazi officers were relaxing. There were many, many people in the room. Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure that he thought the room would be empty and that he could have his way with me. But the room was full of Nazi officers. He said to the Nazi officers, "You see her, she's been here a year and hasn't done a day of work yet." The officers started to laugh.

What a miracle! God was with me. None of them touched me. The only thing that this officer did was to take me into the factory and assign me to three machines instead of one, because I hadn't worked before. To work at one machine was very difficult, but it was impossible to take care of three machines and everyone knew this.

When I was working the night shift, Arnold risked his life for me, bringing me food in the middle of the night. If the Nazis had caught him coming over, they would surely have killed him.

Soon I began to give up. The work was overwhelming and conditions in the factory were very bad- people fell asleep all the time because of being so overworked and tired, not to speak of hungry. I also thought that we had no chance of surviving because once the Russians were close enough, I was certain they would blow up the ammunition factory and kill us all.

Now every week or so there were Selektions and there was no rhyme or reason as to who was being chosen for the Selektions. It just seemed that they needed a certain number of people for each transport and

they were just chosen at random. These people were sent away, they were not killed in Peltsary. I don't know what happened to them. I'm pretty sure that most of them were killed in death camps or on death marches.

I was selected several times and each time I was sent back to the factory. I had no idea why this was happening. Soon I learned that Arnold had been paying the kapo, who was giving the money to the Nazi officer and in this way, I was saved. I knew that Arnold was bringing me food, but until this time, I had no idea he was paying to keep me safe in this camp. I discovered that he had actually been paying all along to keep me safe, from the very beginning. I was amazed and flabbergasted. I just couldn't believe that this man did so much for me and never asked for anything in return.

From that minute on, I started to feel what I think was love for Arnold. But remember, I was a little girl when this war began and times were not normal and I didn't have boyfriends or love affairs. I was simply trying to stay alive all this time. I just couldn't believe that this angel had come to save me.

I know that the kapo who had been at the roll call was very angry at me because I caused him some trouble. I was working the night shift - 12 hours. I was very sleepy and hungry and when I returned to the barracks hoping to sleep, I was immediately awakened and told I had to return to the factory. At the factory the kapo told me I hadn't cleaned the place properly. At this point, I didn't care what he did to me. I yelled at him, "How could you do this, couldn't you let me sleep after 12 hours of work? Couldn't you pick up those few little things? What kind of human being are you? You are a Jew and you are a miserable Jew? You are the worst of our people. You are garbage to me. And, as you know, when the war is over all the garbage will be thrown away and you'll get your justice then."

As I was talking, he was hitting me and blood was coming out of my mouth. I lost a tooth that day. But I didn't care any more. After he finished hitting me, I cleaned up and went back to the barracks.

The following day, Arnold came and saw my swollen face. He was outraged and said that this kapo would pay for this some day.

The Selektions continued and in one of the last ones Arnold ran out of money and couldn't pay the kapo for himself and me, so he paid only for me. He said that he was older and a man and it would be easier for him to survive.

At this time he went into hiding in the camp. So they took Arnold's brother instead and were going to send him away. When I learned this, I went to the main kapo and asked to have my name put on the list as well. He said he wouldn't do that, but I told him I could not live with myself knowing that someone who had risked his life and done so much for me would be sent away and I would be saved. I had to be able to look in the mirror and would not be able to face myself if I did such an ugly thing.

The main kapo told me to tell Arnold to come to the factory and gave me his word of honor that he would not be sent away. Did I really believe him? No, but there was no other way.

Arnold came to the factory and, sure enough, he was sent back to work - the kapo had kept his word.

I told Arnold that I was giving up. He insisted that we *will* survive. He said that his father had come to him in a dream and told him that in two weeks we would be free. Amazingly, exactly two weeks later, January 15, 1945, Arnold came to me in the factory and told me to come with him, that the Russians were already in the streets of Chestochowa. I was afraid because the Nazis were still there and everyone was still at their places working in the factory. Arnold took my hand and pulled me away from the machines and we ran out of the factory together. The Nazis shot at us, but we didn't get hit. We went to a storage space in the camp and hid. We were joined by Arnold's brother and about 20 other people.

Hitler's picture was on the wall of this room. The first thing we did was to take the picture down and smash it! The second thing we did was to say a prayer of thankfulness that we survived this long and a

request that we could leave the camp alive. We were there for many hours. Around midnight, some of our Jewish people knocked on the doors and yelling at us to open the doors, that we were free. Everyone was screaming, crying, singing, kissing. We were free!! The Nazis ran away. The camp was left with several hundred Jews. Some people took ammunition to kill Nazis. We did not.

Arnold said we should stay at the camp until the next morning. He and his brother Joseph and I stayed there. We went to the Nazis living quarters. There we found out that they left in such a hurry that the food was still on the table. Arnold found a ring in the bathroom that someone had left behind. He gave it to me. He also looked through the Nazis living quarters and found some clothes for the three of us to wear. I didn't want any of the clothes that came from Nazis, so I walked out of the camp in the "shmates" that I had been wearing when I came to Chestochowa.

In the morning the sun was shining but it was cold. We had no idea where to go or what to do. We saw a Russian tank that drove up and told us that we were free, to go wherever we wanted to. It's very difficult for me to explain my feelings upon liberation, but I will try. This was a moment I was dreaming of, praying for, hoping for, but I really didn't believe that this moment would come - but it did. I was crying and laughing at the same time. I was looking at the people and hoping that I would find someone familiar to me from my childhood.

We were free, but where would we go? We had no idea what life would be like for us. How could we live and survive as decent human beings, as people who have feelings which were taken away from us for so many years. How would we be able to smile, to cry. How would we react seeing normal tragedies? Would I, as a person be able to overcome everything I had seen and been through in these horrible years? Could I ever be the person I was before, raised with feelings and love? Could there ever be a moment when I would be able to care again? I didn't know and I don't think at that time there were answers to any of these questions.

There was nobody from the Red Cross or any other organization welcoming us or making us feel like human beings. In fact, the

complete opposite is true. The Poles were saying, "Look at that, they say they killed them all, so where are they coming from?" We were horrified to hear this after everything that we had been through.

CHAPTER 10

The war ended and a new chapter of my life began.

Arnold, Joseph and I walked out of the camp together. As soon as we were outside the camp, Arnold said to me, "You know how I feel about you, you know that I love you, but I want you to know that you don't owe me anything and you're not obligated to marry me. You can go back to Warsaw and we could be friends. But I hope and wish that you will marry me and we will have a life together."

Did I love Arnold? This is so complicated. I was just out of hell, liberated, on my own, but what did I feel? I know that I loved being with Arnold. He was almost like a father figure for me. He took care of me and I felt secure with him. I didn't know my own emotions at this time. If I think about it now, it was love. How could I not love a person who cared and did so much for me; who sacrificed everything, including his own life, to save me,?

So I said, "Yes". We walked out together and four days later we were married; not by a rabbi, not in a shul, not in a white gown with a veil, not with relatives and friends around me. The man officiating knew the prayer and Arnold gave me the ring he had found in the Nazis bathroom, and we were married. Instead of laughter, we hugged each other and cried for hours. That was my wedding day.

Arnold and his brother, Joseph were from Chestochowa. When we left the camp along with some other people, we came upon a building whose apartments had belonged to Jewish people before the war. The Nazis had expropriated these apartments for themselves and now the apartments were empty. We took two rooms of a large apartment, one for Arnold and me and the other for Joseph.

We had forgotten the basic rules of normal living and, like small children, we had to re-learn how to live independently.

We left the bundle of clothes Arnold had bought for me in the camp at the apartment, never thinking to lock the door. When we returned everything was gone.

Arnold and Joseph found a bed, a table and chairs from Nazi apartments that had been evacuated and brought them back to our rooms. Because they knew the area, Arnold and Joseph went out of the city to a farm to find some food. They knew the owner of this farm. I stayed in the rooms and put the few things we had in order.

In the apartment, we had a stove that required coal and/or wood to make a fire. I had no idea how to make a fire, so when Arnold came back he found me crying and no fire. He knew how to make a fire and did this for me. He brought potatoes, bread, butter and some farfel from the farmer. This farmer was a really decent person. He knew Arnold and Joseph were Jews and had nothing, so he gave them this food out of the kindness of his heart.

I then tried to cook. I cleaned and cut the potatoes, and since I didn't have much experience cooking, I put the farfel in the cold water with the potatoes. Instead of soup, I ended up with glue. Arnold came home and I was again sitting and crying. I told him I had no idea what I did wrong, but this really didn't look like soup.

Arnold was hungry, so he tried a little of the soup. He said, "It's not too bad." He actually ate some of it. I ate only the bread and butter. That was my first experience as a free, married lady cooking for my husband.

Arnold and I were walking around near our building a few nights later. It was January and this was a particularly cold night. There was a tank parked right in front of our building and I noticed a Russian soldier standing close to the tank and shivering from the cold. I asked him where he went to sleep and he told me that nobody would let him come in and sleep in the building. I felt that it was so unjust. The Russians had liberated us and here was this poor young man freezing in the cold with no place to lay his head.

I was so outraged that nobody would help this guy. I asked Arnold if we could bring him to our place and, of course he agreed. So we laid down some blankets on the floor since we didn't have any extra beds, and he slept there. We shared our food with him; the "glue" soup that

I had made and some bread. The soldier, whose name was Andrei, was very grateful for the warm room and the food.

The following morning, Andrei thanked us and said, "From now on, you are my brother and sister, and I will try to do everything I can to make you more comfortable." And he kept his promise. A few days later, in the middle of the night, we heard a loud knock at the door. We were both apprehensive, not knowing who this was. We heard Andrei's voice saying, "open, don't worry". He told Arnold and Joseph to get dressed and come down with him, which they did. There, on the street right outside the apartment, was a truck filled with food, clothing and a live goat! We were amazed. We asked him what to do with all this and what he wanted in return. He said he didn't want anything except to feed and clothe us. Of course, there was so much that we decided to share all of our good fortune with the other people around us. Now I took some clothes and food and this was the first time I had some real clothes since the time I left the ghetto. The clothes were rather big on me, but Arnold was just great. He was able to take them in, shorten them and he even made me a bra. Andrei told us that he would be going to the front for about three weeks. He told us that if he did not return we would know that he had been killed. Sadly, we never heard from him again.

So this is how we began our life after the war. After about a week, we heard that some trains were going to Warsaw. We decided to travel there to try to find out who had survived the war. I was hoping that I would find my oldest brother and maybe some relatives and friends. I had a large family and I was hopeful some had survived. I just wanted to find someone who knew me before the war.

There was nobody! I returned to the place my family lived. The building was destroyed. I went to some friends' and relatives' houses, to the Red Cross, to the Jewish Committee, and looked around everywhere. Nothing was left, everything was destroyed, everything was gone. I couldn't find even one person who knew me before the war. This is when I began to give up. I nearly collapsed. I started to ask myself: why did I survive? Was I stronger than my older brother, my aunts, uncles, cousins, was I better than them? Why me? What is the point of it?

I felt that life was not worth living. I felt that the best of our people were gone. All the gentle, wonderful people, dead. I thought back to walking over all the dead bodies. Seeing so much horror, knowing about the crematoriums and gas chambers and I still survived. Why and for what?

Arnold and I went back to Chestochowa and I was a broken person. This is when I thought that life was not worth living. I was so guilty that I had survived and all these others were gone and I began trying to commit suicide.

I took an overdose of pills and Arnold caught me. He took me to the hospital where my stomach was pumped. He asked me why I did it and I told him that I had no right to live when all the others were gone. A few days later I came back home. I was terribly depressed and I blamed myself for the things that I felt I hadn't done for my mother and brother while they were still alive. I know, logically, that I couldn't have saved them, but I was so ashamed of my behavior and I couldn't stop thinking about it. Arnold took me to the doctor.

Later, I tried again. I went to the third floor of a building and was ready to jump off when Arnold came and grabbed me away from the window. The doctor told Arnold that he was sure that I would try to commit suicide again. He said that the only thing that would save me is if I could get pregnant.

I was so depressed, I didn't want to even think about getting pregnant. But I did get pregnant. I was so depressed that I couldn't even think about having a baby. The war was still raging and Arnold was of draftable age, so I was also afraid he might be taken away from me. I had no idea what I would do alone with a baby to care for. So I went out and found a doctor who would give me an abortion. It was done in the hospital, so everything was clean. Arnold was very upset, but I really don't know how I felt. My thoughts and feelings were so turbulent.

In May of 1945 the war was finally over. To add insult to injury, after losing so many of our people, the Poles continued to slaughter Jews,

even after the war. One of these casualties was a cousin of Arnold's, who survived the war and the camps. He returned to the Chestochowa area to reclaim a farm that had belonged to his parents. There he was killed by Polish peasants. As time went on, some Poles continued to kill Jews, even to the extent of organizing a pogrom in Kielce in 1946 that killed, I believe, 46 people.

After the war, Arnold went to work curing leather, which he had done before the war. This brought us a good amount of money and Arnold was quite successful. But in Poland, we were left with a Russian, communist occupation and they were beginning to curtail private ownership. One day I read in the newspaper that if anyone was curing leather they would be sent to prison for five years. So we left Chestochowa and we moved to Neidershlazen. Neidershlazen is an area that was German before the war, but became Polish after the war. We lived in a city called Reichenbach or, in Polish they called it Dzierzonow. There we took over a business and again we were quite successful and lived a nice life. But even though my life was materially comfortable, I was still in great distress emotionally. I went to many rabbis and a doctor to help me because of my incredible guilt. Everyone tried to explain to me that it was not my fault that my family died and that I shouldn't feel the way I do. But nobody could help me erase this from my mind and my heart. The only thing that could help me was to happen in a most unusual way.

In 1947, I had an amazing dream. In the dream, I saw my father in shul dressed in a kittel with his best talis, blowing shofar. I was sitting with my mother in the balcony. My father called me down, hugged me and covered me with the talis, kissing my forehead. He said to me, "My child, you will have a son, name him after me." I woke up screaming. Arnold woke up as well. I told him I was pregnant and that I was going to have a son. He was mystified and thought I was hallucinating. I went to the doctor and, sure enough, I was pregnant. This time, I wanted the child very much.

While I was pregnant, I was sure that I was carrying a boy, to be named after my father. When I went to the hospital to deliver the baby, I was put out for a short time, which was the customary way at the time. This was a Catholic hospital. When I awoke, the doctor asked me if I

wanted to know what I had and I replied, "I know, I had a boy." At that, the doctor crossed himself and gasped, "How could you know, how did you know?" I told him that I knew that I was carrying the name of my father. My son, Moshe Peretz Steiner, named after my father, Moshe and Arnold's father, Peretz, was born on September 3, 1948. In English we called him Marvin Paul. He has so many qualities that my father had. My father was a man of learning; he felt that nobody ever knew enough. He studied languages, Einstein, as well as religious subjects. And my son is also the type who loves to study, to learn. He has become a physician of internal medicine.

From that time on, I never again saw my father in my dreams.

CHAPTER 11

While I was pregnant with Marvin, I began to think about what I was qualified to do in the world and realized I had very little education. I had gone to private schools and had a good education up until the war. This gave me the ability to tutor during the war. However, because of the war, I was unable to achieve my dream of becoming a lawyer.

Realistically, I didn't even have a high school diploma. So I decided to go back to school. I attended a school for people who had gone to school, but were unable to complete their education because of the war. In two years I got my high school diploma and a certificate in bookkeeping, which was to be an enormous help to me in the future.

In Reichenbach our life was very pleasant. Arnold and I had a successful clothing business and everything we needed materially. Marvin was a wonderful little boy and we doted on him constantly. As happy as we were, the horror of the war was never far away. Both Arnold and I had horrible nightmares, waking up in a cold sweat, dreaming that the Nazis were chasing us and there was no place to hide. We always woke up screaming. At least we were able to comfort each other. When Arnold was having a nightmare, I would be able to comfort him and vice versa. We talked about our situation, about the people we'd lost. Of course, we'd both lost so many people, but there were always one or two who were so special to us and we talked about them at length. We HAD to talk, there was nothing else we could do but talk and cry. Eventually, we went back to sleep, but this happened so often it was very disturbing.

For me, these feelings continue to this day, not as often as before, but still the same nightmares and the same horrible feelings surface from time to time.

In addition, the knowledge that there was no family; that my child would never have the privilege and happiness of knowing his grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins saddened us so very much.

Along with this, we lived in Poland, a communist country, where there was no real individual freedom. We were afraid that if anyone

denounced us for any reason, we would end up in jail. Anyone who has lived under communism will understand this completely.

We couldn't leave Poland for two reasons. First, there was no place for us to go. Nobody wanted to let us in. Since it was prior to 1948, we couldn't go to Israel, even if we had been able to get out of Poland. Secondly, the communists wouldn't let us out of Poland, even after the creation of Israel in 1948.

We were really desperate to leave as they were confiscating all private business at this time and we knew it was only a matter of time until they got to ours.

In 1949 the Polish government said they would allow some Jews to immigrate to Israel if the Israelis agreed to give them visas. In 1950, the Israeli government gave visas to Polish Jews who had relatives in Israel.

Arnold went with his brother, Joseph to Warsaw to see if they could get visas for our families to immigrate. Joseph didn't pay much attention to the way he looked, but Arnold was meticulous about his appearance. Because the Israelis were interested in people who could do hard manual labor, they gave Joseph a visa, and Arnold came home empty handed.

We were very upset and we decided I would give it a try. I traveled to Warsaw to the Israeli Embassy and found a huge line snaking around the building. All of these people were seeking visas. I saw that it would be impossible to even reach the front of the line. Beside all this, even though I had relatives in Israel, my Uncle Faval and Aunt Manya and family, I had no idea where they lived and had not been in contact with them since before the war. By the time I found them and had them certify that I was their niece, the visas would be gone and we would be out of luck.

At this point, I was really desperate. I decided to do something very bold. There was a policeman standing near the line, keeping everyone in order. I gave the policeman my card, telling him that the man issuing the visas didn't know me, but that I had regards from his

family. Of course, I didn't know this man or his family, but I was desperate to find a way to see and speak to him. Sure enough, I was led to the man issuing the visas. I immediately began to cry. I apologized and told him I had lied to him; that I didn't know his family at all, but that this was the only way that I could get in here to beg him for a visa.

I told him I knew that this was wrong, but that people without relatives in Israel were still entitled to get visas and leave Poland. Should we be victimized yet again because our families had been killed by the Nazis? I described some of what Arnold and I had been through during the Holocaust, how we had lost both of our families, and in the end, both he and I were crying. He asked me for all of our names and wrote something in Hebrew which I didn't understand and asked me to leave the office.

When I returned home, I didn't know if I had a visa or a shopping list because I had no idea what this man had written. Arnold and I could read Hebrew, but we really couldn't understand what was written. We took the paper to the Rabbi and he told us that we all had visas to Israel.

I couldn't believe it! I was flabbergasted, amazed, stunned; just to think that I was really able to pull this off. I really never thought it would work. And, of course, it only did work because of the kindness and understanding of the official in the embassy. I will be forever thankful to him for this noble act.

Both Arnold and I were forced to give up our Polish citizenship before we left. I never told anyone we were leaving because I was afraid that someone would try to stop us. We just left our business one day and never came back. We left Poland March, 1950. While we were on the train leaving Dzierzonow, a Polish official was calling our names. This was very close to the Czech border. We sat very quietly until we passed the border and nobody discovered us. We were thankful to leave the land of our birth, the land that had become, to us, a Jewish cemetery. I knew I would never go back there because every stone, every street, was soaked with Jewish blood.

CHAPTER 12

In March, 1950, we traveled by train to Italy. From there we took a ship and arrived at Haifa Harbor in Israel a week later. Just seeing the land and knowing that it is Israel, our land, made me think about what could have been if we'd had this land before the war. How many lives we could have saved! How many people could possibly have influenced world opinion to help us, to save us! But, sadly, this wasn't so.

I was very emotional when I arrived - I was laughing and crying at the same time. I was with my people; people who would take us in and treat us as brothers. Never again would I have to hear the word "zhid". From now on I was in control of my life. Nobody could tell me where to go or what to do or treat me as if I weren't a human being.

When we arrived we were placed in a refugee camp. So many people were immigrating to Israel from all over the world that Israel was literally overwhelmed. Although it was difficult for us to go to any camp, I understand that the Israelis were afraid of disease and quite honestly didn't have places to put everyone who was coming.

Imagine how difficult it was for such a small country to absorb twice as many people as it's present population. An incredible feat. Yet, in time, this is exactly what happened.

Arnold, the baby and I were among the lucky ones. We had been in contact with our relatives before we came to Israel. My uncle, Feivel who had left Poland in 1938 now lived with his family in Rehovot. My cousin, Shvalbum who had been born in Israel, was living in Haifa.

Seeing my uncle was very emotional. This was the first time since the war that I had found someone who actually knew me before. Someone who knew that I had a family and a decent life in Poland. This was a very emotional moment for me because from the end of the war until that time, I hadn't met anyone who survived who had known me or my large family.

Both Feivel and Shvalbum came and arranged for us to leave the camp soon after we had arrived. We set up housekeeping in an apartment in

Shunat Ephraim, a small neighborhood outside of Rehovot, not far from Feivel's family.

The apartment was small, but adequate and we considered ourselves very lucky to have anything, as there was a severe housing shortage in Israel with all the new immigrants coming in.

Unfortunately, there was little work to be had in Israel at this time. It was a very rough time for everyone. There was rationing and it was impossible to get many food items such as milk, chicken, butter, sugar. The only thing that was plentiful was bread.

Luckily, we had secretly sent most of our belongings to Israel before we left Poland. In order to obtain food, we were forced, once again to sell some of our most prized possessions. I remember selling my Rosenthal China service for 12 for a chicken and some milk. Crystal, silver, all of it gone to provide sustenance for us.

I knew that my grandparents had left Poland for Israel (called Palestine at that time) when I was a very young child. My grandfather was a rabbi and because they were religious people, their dream was to live and die in Israel. I don't remember either of them. But I did know that they had purchased some land in B'nai Brak. Shortly after we moved into our apartment, Arnold went to B'nai Brak to find out what had happened to my grandparents. When he returned he told me that my grandparents had been very generous people and an orphanage in B'nai Brak had been named for my grandfather. He also told me that there was some land with a little house on it. But most exciting of all, after meeting with the mayor of the town, Arnold found that the main rabbi of Lod, Rabbi Kutner, was my first cousin, whom I had never met.

Rabbi Kutner was the oldest cousin in the family and I was one of the youngest. I know that he was also a holocaust survivor. Before the war he married a Rumanian lady and was a rabbi there for a while. With the outbreak of the war, they were sent to Russia and spent the war there, I believe in Siberia. He came to Israel shortly after the end of the war. He became the Chief Rabbi of Lod and, eventually, was a teacher of Rabbi Lau, the present Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel.

When we met Rabbi Kutner, he was thrilled to see me and know that someone from the family had survived. He questioned whether Arnold and I had been married in a religious service. He remarried us, blessed us and even wrote a ketubah for us.

We discussed with him the land, including a house standing on it. We decided to sell the land and the house and split the profits with Rabbi Kutner. The amount of money we received for all of this was enough to buy approximately 10 chickens. When I think of what that land is worth today, I have to laugh. I could have been very rich, but at the time we were hungry and in need of any money we could get.

I had another cousin that I met a little later. His name was David Zyskind, my uncle Nathan's son. He was the head of a kibbutz near the Syrian border and he wanted us to come live with him there. We really didn't want to go to kibbutz and he was very disappointed. In the time I was in Israel, I only saw him and his family twice.

Arnold was able to get a few small jobs, but nothing permanent. In the 2 1/2 years we were in Israel, he worked about a month altogether.

Arnold's dream was to come to the United States. He had two brothers who had come long before the war and he wanted to be reunited with them. In Israel, we received affidavits to come to the United States. It was with very mixed emotions that we left Israel. Arnold, on the one hand, was so anxious to come to the United States, but I loved Israel and wanted to stay there. I felt that this was my land, my home, the place where I should stay, the place where I should raise my child.

So with great sadness I left Israel in October, 1952 and sailed to Greece where we spent 3 days and on to the United States. When the ship went through the harbor and I saw the Statue of Liberty, I began to feel a little better about leaving. I knew I was in a free country where we would have a chance to prosper and live in peace without fear.

Chapter 13

It took us a week to arrive in New York City, and I was very excited to see my Aunt Helen and my cousin, Miriam who were there to greet us. Even though I had never met them, I knew they had gone to the United States and was eager to get to know them.

We stayed in New York for a week and then came to Chicago where Arnold's brothers were located. We had expected them to meet us at the train, but nobody was there. Finally, from an address that we'd been sent, we found Arnold's nephew. Arnold's brother, Irving, finally arrived and got us a small room in a house. The other brother, Arthur, came to see us the next day. Neither of them seemed very happy about our arrival and I was very upset that I had left Israel. A considerable sum of money that we had been sending Irving from Poland a little at a time while we had our business there, seemed to have vanished into thin air.

I should have sent to my Aunt Helen for tickets to leave and go back to New York, but I wasn't thinking clearly. So our beginning in this country was really horrible. We ended up having to leave the small room and slept 3 nights in a park until Marvin became ill. I took him to the hospital and the doctor wanted to admit him, but I couldn't let him stay there with strangers. I knew we had to find somewhere to live. I was really desperate and I just went up and down the streets ringing doorbells and asking for lodging in return for work. Finally, an old woman let us in, fed us and let us stay for the night.

Arnold went to the Jewish Federation and they told him about a job at Hart, Schaffner and Marx and he immediately went down there. He was hired to press clothes so at least we would have some income. We ended up staying with this kind woman until we could save \$100 and rent a place our own.

About two months later we moved into our own apartment on Avers near 15th Street. The apartment was wonderful, but it was empty. It took another couple of weeks to save \$50. With that money, I went to the Salvation Army. I told them that I have no furniture and for that small amount, they gave us a truckload of furniture to furnish 2

bedrooms, a living room, dining room and kitchen. There are fine people everywhere and we were lucky enough to have met up with the wonderful people from the Salvation Army. To this day, I donate things and money to this fine charity, which were there for us in our time of need.

Because the rent on our new apartment was high - \$60 per month, I took in a border that paid \$30. This helped us to be able to pay our bills. Just when we were hoping to ease our burdens a little, Arnold became ill with kidney stones. He had left home healthy and suddenly I was notified that he was in the hospital. He passed the stones, but the tension and stress of all that had been happening combined with this sudden illness, caused him to have a nervous breakdown.

This was when I realized that I have to do something to keep our household going. Arnold couldn't work for about a month, so I decided to look for a job to be able to keep the apartment and to keep my family together.

Arnold wasn't the same person he had been before. He was a happy, go-lucky guy and suddenly he became a hypochondriac. He thought he had cancer and was dying. I knew he was physically fine, but I didn't know what to do to help him. One day, in the middle of the winter, Marvin wanted to go downstairs to play in the snow. This was the first time he'd ever seen snow and he was intrigued. I felt so badly and cried when I told him he couldn't go downstairs because his shoes were torn. I don't have to describe my sadness as a mother who had to deny her child even the simplest pleasure. Marvin started to cry and went to his father, saying, "You're not sick, Mommy said so, you just don't want to work. And because you won't work, I don't have any shoes and I can't play in the snow." When Arnold heard this, he started crying and decided to go back to work the next day. This child saved Arnold's life.

Even though Arnold went back to work, I still felt I needed to get a job to make ends meet. Because we had nobody to leave Marvin with, Arnold worked the day shift and I worked at night. I knew a little English from the classes I'd taken when I first arrived, but not enough to get a good office job, so I worked at two different factory jobs; one

in a candy factory and the other in a rubber factory. In the candy factory I had to fill bags of candy as they came sliding down a chute. If I didn't have the bag there in time, the candy would fall all over the place. This I did 8 hours a day while Arnold was still home sick.

The other job in the rubber factory I worked at night. I would cut rubber. I still have the scars to prove it. I left the candy factory when Arnold went back to work and kept the night job. So Arnold worked in the daytime and I worked at night.

Arnold returned to his job at Hart, Schaffner and Marx and I continued working in the rubber factory. About 2 months later, I was coming home about 3AM when I heard someone following behind me. I began to run and luckily made it home. But I was very upset and afraid to come home by myself. I had to go out and look for a day job, I could not continue to come home alone in the middle of the night.

At this time we put Marvin in Arie Crown Day School so we could work while he was at school.

I began to look for a day job in a factory. I knew a little bit of English, and was going to school at night, but I didn't think I knew enough to get an office job. I was walking around Homan Avenue when I saw the Sears complex. I didn't know it was Sears, I thought it was some kind of factory. A policeman asked me what I was doing there and I told him I was looking for work. He directed me to the employment office. Unfortunately, the application was entirely in English. I could understand some of it, but as luck would have it, a Polish girl was sitting next to me and translated everything I didn't understand.

The supervisor of catalog accounting, Mr. Gorsica came over to me. He looked at my application and since he was Polish, told me how pleased he was to meet a fellow Pole from Warsaw. But I believe initially, because of my maiden name, Zyskind, he thought I might be Jewish. Of course, he was not allowed to ask if I was Jewish, so he asked me if I spoke Hebrew or Yiddish. I had been warned about this, so I said "NO". He hired me on the spot, but told me that I had 2 years to get my high school equivalency diploma that I got 2 years later. I did bookkeeping in the catalog accounting department and I loved this job.

I was making good money and I was very proud to be working in an office and not in a factory.

I had this job for about seven years. I was the only Jewish girl in this department and nobody knew I was Jewish. I always took off for Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur, but since it came out on a different date every year, nobody suspected. I either used my sick days or my vacation. Finally, I decided that I needed to tell them the truth. So I called Mr. Gorsica over and told him I wouldn't be at work the next day. He asked why and I told him it was a Jewish holiday. He remembered so many years before that he had asked me if I speak Yiddish or Hebrew and I told him again that I did not, but that this didn't mean I wasn't Jewish. I went home for the holidays and when I came back after Yom Kippur, he called me in the office and fired me. He didn't say it was because I was Jewish, but because the work was slowing down. Of course, I knew that this wasn't the case.

Mr. Gorsica tried to stop me from getting unemployment compensation and I went to a hearing to find out why I wasn't receiving my money and give my side of the story. I told the hearing officer everything; how I had hidden my Jewishness from Mr. Gorsica and how fired me after I had revealed it. Shortly after this, I received full compensation. Sometime later I received a letter from Sears that I threw out unopened. After that, I received a telegram from Sears to come back to work there. I called and asked for Mr. Gorsica but they told me he no longer worked there. The new supervisor asked me to come back and assured me that Mr. Gorsica was not in charge any more. Unfortunately, during this time Arnold and I had purchased a laundromat so that we would have some way of making a living and I decided that I had to be in the laundromat to make it work, so I turned down the job. I was so sorry I didn't return to Sears. I really enjoyed that job.

When I left Sears, I received about \$3,000 in profit sharing money. With this money and some additional that we had scraped together, we put a deposit on a two-flat near the laundromat. One of the apartments looked lovely, but one was in horrible condition and I remember that Arnold worked very hard to clean, paint, lay new flooring and make it into a beautiful place to live.

We had the laundromat about 3 years and finally decided to sell it because it never made much money. A gentleman came one day and spoke to Arnold about buying the place. He gave Arnold \$500 and said he would return with the rest of the money shortly. We were amazed that we might be able to sell this place for \$7,000. We could hardly wait to get out.

When the man returned the next day, I was alone in the store. He told me I looked like a nice lady and asked if I would tell him the truth about whether he could make a living here. He said he had five children. I know that I should have said "yes, of course", but I just couldn't lie to him and sleep at night. I told him, "this place is not for you", and I ripped up the \$500 check. Arnold almost killed me for doing this, but I just couldn't live with myself if I deceived this poor man.

In the end, we gave the store away for \$500.

I know it sounds crazy, but we took that \$500 and went on vacation, Arnold went against his will. He thought I was out of my mind, but I felt that we needed to rest and restore ourselves. We were still young and if we could come back from vacation healthy, we would have a much better chance to find something and would certainly be in a better frame of mind.

When we returned to Chicago, Arnold was able to get a job in a textile factory, where he worked for many years.

I went to the Jewish Federation and they suggested a job that was open at Baron's which was a chain store that sells clothing. Their main office was here in Chicago and they had stores all over the country, but, surprisingly, none in Chicago.

I was hired as an Assistant Buyer. My job consisted of working with the Buyer deciding how much inventory in blouses and lingerie each store would receive and then making sure that each store had enough. If one store needed more inventory and another had too much, I was responsible for transferring the merchandise. I had to keep detailed records on all the transfers and there was quite a bit of responsibility.

I really loved this job and I hoped some day to become a Buyer myself, but God had a different plan for me.

After Marvin was born, we hadn't thought about having more children because our life was so precarious. We lived in several countries and didn't know where we were going to end up. I had gotten pregnant in 1954, but it had ended in miscarriage. Suddenly, in 1961, I became pregnant again. This was a surprise, but what a wonderful surprise! On March 10, 1962, I had the most wonderful little girl and named her Muriel Felicia after both of our mothers.

I was thrilled with my new daughter, but I had to give up my job. I loved the job, but I felt and still feel very strongly that a mother should be home to raise her own children. Nobody will give the love and caring of a child's own mother.

When Muriel was about 7 years old, I went back to work. This time I found a job doing bookkeeping for the management office of a high rise building on Sheridan Road. I liked the job very much and they were very good to me. I tried to be considerate of the tenants and they were very nice to me in return.

I particularly remember Mrs. Carson who lived in the penthouse on the 42nd floor. She and her husband were the owners of Carson's Rib Restaurants. She had a very cute little dog and she would always come down to the office and ask me if I had eaten lunch and offer to bring me food. Many times she and other residents brought me cookies and chocolate and other goodies. For Christmas I would get a carload of Christmas presents from the apartment owners. I remember one year Mrs. Carson gave me a big bottle of Chanel No.5 perfume. She was such a lovely person.

One time I went to the 41st floor on some business regarding one of the residents. After I took care of the business on that floor, I needed to go to Mrs. Carson's on the 42nd floor. I didn't want to wait for the elevator for just one floor, so I took the stairway instead. What a mistake!! I had no idea that you needed a key to open the doors to the hallway. I thought possibly because this was the penthouse, it needed

a key for entry. So I went back to the 41st floor and tried to get in. My heart sank when I realized that a key was required for *every* floor.

The stairs were very narrow and the lighting was not very good. There wasn't a soul in the stairwell. I had no choice, but to walk down. My heart was beating so fast and I was very frightened. When I finally got to the ground floor, thankfully, the door to the street was open. A security guard was standing outside the door. He was so surprised to see me. He asked where I had come from and I told him. When I saw him cross himself, I realized that it was worse than even I had imagined. He said, "You are very lucky, because if something had happened to you, nobody would have found you for two weeks. They clean this stairwell only once every two weeks.

I worked at this job for about 5 years. I enjoyed the work, but I wanted to advance a little further in my career. I took some classes in accounting as well as some general classes. This was really a wonderful time for me. I had always wanted to go back to school; I had a hunger for knowledge, and, of course, during the war, this was denied to all Jews. So this opportunity was very exciting for me. It took until my 50's to enjoy the education that I should have had a young person, but certainly better late than never. I have always felt you're never too young, or too old to learn.

Life was good and things were going well, but we can never escape the past. One day in 1972 while I was reading the newspaper, when I came across an appeal for witnesses who had been imprisoned in Maidanek Death Camp. It seems that they caught some Nazis and wanted to prosecute them. I called the German Consulate whose number was in the newspaper. They arranged for me to fly to Dusseldorf to testify. I don't have to tell you how emotional I became upon learning that some of the Nazi guards from the camp had been discovered. Among these guards were Brigitta; the devil in a human body, Kobilla, who was not much better and Perelca, who was like a Pearl in this horrible place. I have mentioned all three of them before.

The Jewish Federation in Germany arranged everything for the witnesses - hotel rooms, flights, meals.

How can I describe the emotions? On one hand, I visualized and lived through everything once again upon seeing these individuals. On the other hand, it was the happiest moment for me. I was able to point them out and testify against them. This was a great victory for me to be able to live to do this for all the people who were slaughtered, who weren't as lucky as I was and could no longer speak for themselves.

I remember testifying against Kobilla. She denied us the least little shred of humanity. I asked the judge if I could address her in German. He agreed. So I went up very close to her and said to her, "Do you remember when I mentioned to you that 20 women are going to work" and you said to me, "What did you say to me? You said "women" - these are not women, these are garbage, these are sh*t." And then you beat me. Now, with tears in my eyes, I said to her, "You are the one, I survived, and now it's time for you to pay for all the sins and all the horror which you caused every one of us in this Hell.

You are what YOU called me, YOU are the garbage, YOU are the sh*t."

After this I broke down in hysterical crying. I had to be removed from the courtroom. I couldn't testify any more and had to return the next day.

When I returned to the courtroom, I testified against Brigitta who was the most terrible sadist, riding on her white horse and killing people.

The guard we called Perelca (we didn't know her real name) was like a little Pearl for us. She protected us and took chances to save us and keep us alive as much as was possible for her. She was a truly good person. She was the only human being in this terrible, terrible place.

As I found out later, Brigitta and Kobilla got life in prison. Perelca was freed.

My life had been going along well and even though thoughts and of our previous life were never far from us, going to Germany to testify brought everything back to the forefront. It took me some time to get back to my normal, everyday life with its responsibilities.

A few years later, something happened in our community which changed all of our lives.

In 1976 a movie called Holocaust came out. That was the first time that people were interested in knowing or talking about the Holocaust. Up to that time, nobody was interested in hearing our stories. I remember when we came here and I tried to tell my Aunt Helen about what happened to me and how her own mother and all her family was killed, she didn't want to listen. She told me to forget the past and build a new life. I don't think she ever let me tell her about her own family in Warsaw. We needed a shoulder to cry on, but there was no one interested in giving us that shoulder.

In 1977, a small group of neo-Nazis announced their intention to march through the streets of Skokie, a community that is and was home to many Holocaust survivors.

The Rabbis told us to ignore them and pay no attention. But we, the survivors, could not accept this. We knew that never again will we shut the windows and pull down the shades. This time, we would fight back from the beginning. We would not allow them to create another cataclysm like the Holocaust.

Thanks to our wonderful Mayor Albert Smith, of blessed memory, we all joined together to fight against the Nazis. Eventually, because of our efforts, even though the law permitted a march, the Nazis decided to march in another community. The entire Jewish community, including all of us Holocaust survivors, many old and young Jews and Gentiles combined together to make certain that the Nazis would not intimidate anyone physically or mentally.

It's a good bet that knowing all these people were waiting for them in Skokie - some with baseball bats - all outraged -- created the conditions that convinced them to publicize their evil ideas and intentions elsewhere.

After this event I became part of a small group of Holocaust survivors who gathered to discuss this situation. We realized that the people in this country really did not know much about the Holocaust -- how it began -- what actually happened. We understood that it was our mission to educate the young and old about the Holocaust; to make them understand and to counteract hatred with education and understanding.

No more than 12-15 people began the Holocaust Foundation of Illinois. Through hard work, persistence and determination we achieved more than we ever dreamed possible.

From this small group we are now a Foundation of thousands. We have our own building, a great speakers' bureau staffed by survivors, a museum with authentic artifacts and pictures, a staff of docents who give tours, lectures, and an impressive staff of dedicated educators who give classes for teachers.

As of this date, tens of thousands of students come to our Foundation to hear survivors speak and tour our museum. We also send speakers to schools, churches and fraternal organizations not only in Illinois, but many other states.

Through the dedicated and persistent efforts of our active members, led by our extraordinary past President, the late Erna Gans, we were the first state in the U.S. to pass a law mandating Holocaust education in all public schools. The parochial schools, who are not mandated have decided they, too, want their children to learn about the Holocaust and have been some of our most vociferous advocates.

It is now over 20 years since the beginning of our Foundation. I, personally, must say that next to the pride I have in my children and grandchildren, I am so proud and thankful to be one of the founding members of this vital foundation.

The Holocaust Foundation of Illinois will insure that our loved ones, as well as all victims of the Holocaust, will not be forgotten. In these difficult times, our children need guidance and knowledge to counteract the evils they face.

I am so grateful to be a part of an organization that spreads light and understanding and love.

USHMM LIBRARY



01 0001 0128 7307